

MUSLIM EXPANSION AND
BYZANTINE COLLAPSE
IN NORTH AFRICA

Who "lost" Christian North Africa? Who won it and how? Walter E. Kaegi takes a fresh look at these perennial questions, with maps and on-site observations, in this exciting new book. Persisting clouds of suspicion and blame overshadowed many Byzantine attempts to defend North Africa, as Byzantines failed to meet the multiple challenges from different directions which ultimately overwhelmed them. While the Muslims forcefully and permanently turned Byzantine internal dynastic and religious problems and military unrest to their advantage, they brought their own strengths to a dynamic process that would take a long time to complete – the transformation of North Africa. An impartial comparative framework helps to sort through identity politics, "Orientalism" charges and counter-charges, and institutional controversies; this book also includes a new study of the decisive battle of Sbeitla in 647, helping readers to understand what befell Byzantium, and indeed empires from Rome to the present.

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Acknowledgments

This investigation began to take form in 1996 even though my interests in North Africa date back to graduate work at Harvard in the late 1950s and early 1960s, and even before, to my last two years as an undergraduate at Haverford College 1957–8, when I first honed my interests in Algeria (Kaegi 1958). North Africa also attracted the attention and commitment of my wife Louise, who served in the US Peace Corps in Sousse, Tunisia, for two years in the middle 1960s, before we first met and then married. Although I am not an Africanist, one of my first-year graduate school papers at Harvard involved Byzantine North Africa, and I have published on some other aspects of Byzantino-Africana (Kaegi 1965; 1984). In an earlier book *Byzantium and the Early Islamic Conquests* (1992, 1995) I sought to make some connections between fields in investigating Muslim conquests in Byzantine Syria, Palestine, and upper Mesopotamia. I attempt to make connections again here even though North Africa is not Syria or Palestine or Anatolia. I have also now written a shorter essay on problems in Byzantine Egypt at the time of its subjugation by Muslims (Kaegi 1995, 1998). Moving westward in the Mediterranean, by undertaking this investigation I am returning to the area of some of my earliest historical studies and interests, on Byzantine North Africa. I am grateful for previous advice on North African and Byzantine and Early Islamic topics from former teachers, students, colleagues, and critics.

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Many other hands contributed to this book. Without these institutional structures and aids and the human assistance of individuals such as two anonymous readers, and Salvatore Cosentino, Renate Holod, Cécile Morrisson, Irfan Shahid, Edward Villalta, Mike Clover, Michael Allen, Susan Stevens, Ann-Marie Yasin, Paul M. Cobb, Bruce Hitchner, Fred M. Donner, Nathan Leidholm, Peter Simons, and my students in my courses at the University of Chicago on "North Africa Late Antiquity to Islam" and "Byzantium and Islam" this book would not have taken its present form. At Cambridge University Press my editor Michael Sharp, my production editors Elizabeth Hanlon and Sarah Roberts, and my rigorous copy editor Anna Oxbury improved the final manuscript, while at The University of Chicago Rana Mikati diligently verified my Arabic references. Thanks are also due to Bruce Tracy for compiling the index. Tunisian colleagues Professors Abdulhamid Fehri and Jamal Abdulji, both of whom are members of the faculty of history in the University of Sfax, gave me valuable comments. I owe much to Professor Mohamed Benabbès of Tunis (Université 9 Avril), who generously shared his important dissertation with me. I also learned much from critiques and from my conversations with my Africanist colleague Ralph Austen. Chris Winters of The University of Chicago Regenstein Library Map Collection helped significantly with cartographic challenges. Roberto Marques provided the crucial expertise for electronic resolutions of visual challenges. I am very grateful to these and to all of the unnamed others who assisted me. I thank my wife Louise for her patient help and understanding throughout

all of the diverse challenges that confronted us in completing this inquiry and preparing it as a book.

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As a North American of Swiss-American descent I lack ethnic identification with the Maghrib or with its former colonial rulers. That limits me but provides some distance in interpretation, although historical research and perspectives from a base in North America bring many problems and challenges of their own. There is still other baggage. As a member of the final cadre of graduate students, and the only one who was a Byzantinist, who took courses with and prepared for and took oral examinations with H. A. R. Gibb at Harvard in the early 1960s, and for whose learned instruction I am very grateful, I have mixed opinions about accusations of “Orientalism.”

Travels in Tunisia, Morocco, Algeria, the western desert of Egypt, Sardinia, Majorca, and Corsica over the course of years since 1996 have improved my knowledge, especially with respect to North Africa, of terrain, archaeological sites, and routes where decisive events and processes took place in the middle and late seventh and early eighth century. But I have also learned much from modern scholarship of and discussions with Maghribi historians and archaeologists. I appreciate their advice even though I cannot acknowledge each of them by name. I have learned to try to understand events and processes from a Maghribi as well as from a European or Transatlantic perspective. There is no one coherent Maghribi perspective; events seen from Morocco can and do differ from viewpoints in Tunisia or Algeria. I try to take account of that. I am conscious of the opinion of some social scientists that historians need to write history more reflexively and that they should remain more conscious “positionally” of themselves during their investigations and composition of their exposition. I may not be able to achieve their standards. Much of this manuscript took form during my residence as a Senior Fulbright–Hays Fellow in Salamambo/Carthage and in Constantine, Algeria. Living in those very different sites, one on the Mediterranean and the other in the interior and capital of what was the province of Numidia, provides some valuable insights as well as many indelible memories.

Abbreviations

<i>AA</i>	<i>Antiquités Africaines</i>
<i>AABSC</i>	<i>Abstracts, Annual Byzantine Studies Conference</i>
<i>AASS</i>	<i>Acta Sanctorum</i>
<i>AB</i>	<i>Analecta Bollandiana</i>
<i>ACO</i>	<i>Acta Conciliorum Oecumenicorum</i>
<i>AHR</i>	<i>American Historical Review</i>
<i>ANSMN</i>	<i>Museum Notes, American Numismatic Society</i>
<i>AT</i>	<i>Antiquité Tardive</i>
<i>BAR</i>	<i>British Archaeological Reports</i>
<i>BASOR</i>	<i>Bulletin, American Schools of Oriental Research</i>
<i>BCTH</i>	<i>Bulletin Archéologique du Comité des Travaux Historiques et Scientifiques</i>
<i>BF</i>	<i>Byzantinische Forschungen</i>
<i>BGA</i>	<i>Bibliotheca Geographorum Arabicorum</i>
<i>BGMS</i>	<i>Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies</i>
<i>BN Cat</i>	<i>Catalogue des monnaies Byzantines de la Bibliothèque Nationale</i>
<i>BS/EB</i>	<i>Byzantine Studies/Etudes Byzantines</i>
<i>BSFN</i>	<i>Bulletin de la Société française de Numismatique</i>
<i>BSOAS</i>	<i>Bulletin, School of Oriental and African Studies University of London</i>
<i>BZ</i>	<i>Byzantinische Zeitschrift</i>
<i>CA</i>	<i>Cahiers Archéologiques</i>
<i>CC</i>	<i>Corpus Christianorum</i>

CFHB	<i>Corpus Fontium Historiae Byzantinae</i>
CHGRW	<i>Cambridge History of Greek and Roman Warfare</i>
CIL	<i>Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum</i>
CMH ₂	<i>New Cambridge Medieval History</i>
CSCO	<i>Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium</i>
CSCO SS	<i>Corpus Scriptorum Christianorum Orientalium, Scriptorum Syri</i>
CSHB	<i>Corpus Scriptorum Historiae Byzantinae</i>
DO Cat	<i>Catalogue of the Byzantine Coins in the Dumbarton Oaks Collection and in the Whittemore collection</i>
DOP	<i>Dumbarton Oaks Papers</i>
EB	<i>Encyclopédie Berbère</i>
EHR	<i>English Historical Review</i>
EI	<i>Encyclopedia of Islam</i> , 1st and 2nd edns.
HTR	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
ILAlg	<i>Inscriptions latines de l'Algérie</i>
JRA	<i>Journal of Roman Archaeology</i>
JRS	<i>Journal of Roman Studies</i>
JSAI	<i>Jerusalem Studies in Arabic and Islam</i>
MEFRA	<i>Mélanges, Ecole française de Rome: Antiquité</i>
MGH AA	<i>Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Auctores Antiquissimi</i>
MGH SRL	<i>Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Scriptorum rerum Langobardicarum et Italicarum</i>
MGH SRM	<i>Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Scriptorum rerum Merovingicarum</i>
MIB	<i>Moneta Imperii Byzantini</i>
OCA	<i>Orientalia Christiana Analecta</i>
ODB	<i>Oxford Dictionary of Byzantium</i>
OLA	<i>Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta</i>
PG	<i>Migne, Patrologia Graeca</i>
PL	<i>Migne, Patrologia Latina</i>
PLRE	<i>Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire</i>
PMBZ	<i>Prosopographie der mittelbyzantinischen Zeit, Abt. 1</i>

<i>PO</i>	<i>Patrologia Orientalis</i>
<i>RE</i>	<i>Paulys Realencyclopädie der Classischen Altertumswissenschaft</i>
<i>REB</i>	<i>Revue des Etudes Byzantines</i>
<i>Rec. Const.</i>	<i>Recueil des Notices et Mémoires de la Société Archéologique Historique et Géographique du Département de Constantine</i>
<i>REI</i>	<i>Revue des Etudes Islamiques</i>
<i>RIC</i>	<i>Roman Imperial Coinage</i>
<i>RN</i>	<i>Revue Numismatique</i>
<i>RT</i>	<i>Revue Tunisienne</i>
<i>TAVO</i>	<i>Tübinger Atlas des Vorderen Orients</i>
<i>TM</i>	<i>Travaux et Mémoires (Paris)</i>
<i>TU</i>	<i>Texte und Untersuchungen</i>

CHAPTER I

Challenges of the subject and the sources

The Byzantines and their leaders believed and proudly proclaimed that they were Roman, that their empire was Roman, and that it was the continuation and heir of the Roman Empire.¹ They believed they had reconquered North Africa in the sixth century from the Vandals because it was divinely ordained (“God in his mercy has delivered in his hands Africa and all of its provinces”) and a rightful restoration of Roman rule “as far as the frontiers that were those of the Roman state before the invasions of the Vandals and Moors.”² The right-hand side of the bottom plaque of the famous Barberini Ivory now in the Louvre celebrates stereotypical cowering Africans with traditional elephant-ear head coverings (as well as trousered Asians) bringing objects of submission and tribute to the Roman emperor, whom many specialists now identify as Justinian I, who appears on horseback above that plaque.³ Byzantine domination of Africa and Africans was a stock theme inherited from earlier Roman imperial art. It was a legacy that had become incorporated as a core element of sixth-century imperial prestige. Celebration of Byzantine domination of Africa and Asia made sense in the sixth century, as the Barberini Ivory attests, especially after the Byzantine reconquest of Africa in 533–4. However much the legacy of that victorious African political theme was fading in the following century, it had become a basic element of imperial political claims. Already by command of Emperor Theodosius I and during his reign (379–95), remains of Terentius and Africanus, two African saints who had met martyrdom in the third-century anti-Christian persecution by Emperor Decius, had been transferred to Constantinople, for veneration and for the protection of the city.⁴

¹ Alexander 1962; Maas 1986; Averil Cameron 1991a; Ahrweiler 1975.

² *Codex Justinianus* 1.27.1.7, and 1.27.2.

³ Volbach and Dosogne 1968: 200, plate 91; Kitzinger 1977: 96–7, fig. 176; Wright 1977; Cutler 1984; Wessel 1960: 665–70, esp. 669.

⁴ Theodore Lector, *Ecl. Hist.*, bk. 11, c. 62, *PG* 86.1: 213. Commentary: *Acta Sanctorum*, Antwerp 1675, repr. Brussels, 1968, vol. 9, April 10, pp. 860–2. Holger Klein kindly provided this information. Conant 2010.

So North African Christendom had long had a presence and an identification of some kind with Constantinople. Early (fourth-century) deposits in the provinces of Numidia and Mauretania Sitifensis of what were believed to be precious fragments of the True Cross bore testimony to North Africa's long-term ties with Christian sites in the eastern provinces of the empire, and most notably the Holy Land.⁵ Here, as elsewhere, Byzantine triumphalism foundered and crashed in the seventh century in the face of a surging Islam, but unlike the fortunes of empire at Constantinople and in Anatolia there would be no Byzantine recovery in North Africa.

OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY

This is a study from several perspectives of the end of that triumphal but poorly understood and unappreciated Byzantine era in North Africa with its administrative centers of Carthage and of Constantine, Numidia, linked with Constantinople. It is controversial and debatable the extent to which the Byzantines dominated what modern historians have designated the Byzantine era in North Africa, or even whether it is valid to use the term Byzantine Africa.⁶ Nevertheless significant regions of North Africa were subject to Byzantine imperial authority between 533 and the end of the seventh century.

The breakdown of Byzantine and the emergence and expansion of Muslim political and military power in North Africa are the subject of this investigation. To an extent it is a study of the interaction of religious and military history, an investigation of sources, some of which are neglected, but it is not one into the disappearance of Christianity in North Africa⁷ or the diverse and important issues of the conversions of autochthonous, that is, local, Maghribi populations to Islam.⁸ The military dimension is a fundamental one, but this is necessarily more than an investigation into military history, for ethnic, geographic, and religious elements combined in the seventh century to form a complex mix and process with multiform outcomes. Psychology played a role too. North African events, changes,

⁵ In 359 in Sitifensis: *CIL* Suppl. III, no. 20600, and before 373 in Numidia: *CIL* VIII, 2, no. 9255; Frolov 1961: 158–9; Klein 2004: 22.

⁶ Charles Diehl 1896 immortalized the concept of *L'Afrique Byzantine* or Byzantine Africa.

⁷ Handley 2004: 291–310; Kaegi 1965; Tilley 2001.

⁸ Cautionary and judicious remarks of John Wansbrough 1969: 161–2 against conflating the Muslim conquest with the process of Islamicization. On the autochthonous North Africans, who are often called Berbers, whom others call Amazigh: Brett and Fentress 1996: 10–88. In this book I prefer to use the term *autochthonous*, not *Berbers*, which, like the term *indigenous*, is offensive to some. Others prefer the term *local populations*, which does not distinguish between Latinized and tribally organized populations although binary polarization may also be inappropriate.

and conditions in the eighth century and later are important but outside the direct scope of this inquiry.

It might be argued that the subject at hand is less what the Byzantines did than how the locals responded to challenges and changing conditions. Local agency, or more precisely, fragmented local agency, is important. The Romanized inhabitants (Romano-Africans, Latin-speaking, Catholic) of North Africa for their part may well have had reservations or ambivalent attitudes toward Byzantine officials and the imperial government in the seventh century.⁹ However, many North African subjects probably shared the sentiments of the contemporary Isidore, Bishop of Seville, a polymath who died in the fateful year of 636. Despite his dislike for Byzantium, Isidore bluntly wrote of Constantinople "it alone is the equal of Rome in importance and power" and declared "it is now also the seat of the Roman Empire and head of the entire East, as Rome is of the West."¹⁰ The process by which the imperial administration in North Africa had become overwhelmingly Greek by the first half of the fifth century continued to reinforce itself in the seventh century.¹¹ Many of these Romanized inhabitants, like the Byzantine official bureaucracy and military, viewed the arrival of the Muslim armies as an invasion or worse. But Romanized subjects were not the only inhabitants of North Africa.

This is a history of different realities and narratives, whether or not of a new reality. Older forced historiographical categories are no longer working. This is simultaneously a study of problems in Byzantine, Late Antique, North African or Mahgribi, and Early Islamic history. It cannot and does not fit simply into any binary polarization or into older conceptual categories of regionalizations. Yet investigation and historical exposition also encounter difficulty, for Byzantine, Late Antique, North African, and Early Islamic elements never became neatly fused or tightly integrated in the initiatives and responses of the seventh century.

THE HISTORICAL AND GEOGRAPHICAL SCOPE

First, some words about the scope, which includes events and changes in Byzantine Africa. "Byzantine North Africa" means that region between

⁹ Greatrex 2000: 268. In general on identity: Barth 1969: 9–38. Acceptable working definition of Romano-Africans by Conant 2004: 22: "Romanized Africans of Libyan or Punic extraction, as well as descendants of Italians, Greeks, or other inhabitants who had settled in the African provinces of the empire. Distinguished from foreigners who include Vandals, Moors [non-Romanized autochthonous peoples], and Romans from other provinces."

¹⁰ Isidore of Seville, *The Etymologies of Isidore of Seville*, trans. S. A. Barney, W. J. Lewis, J. A. Beach, and O. Berghof (Cambridge: 2006): 15.1.42, p. 303.

¹¹ Millar 2006: 6–38.

533 and 711 CE, that is, most notably between the reconquest by Emperor Justinian I from the Vandals, and the final Muslim conquest of Carthage in 698 and the years that immediately followed. This study begins in the reign of Emperor Heraclius (610–41), who originally seized power in North Africa in a civil war that raged from 608 to 610. The focus is on the years after 630 but owes much to excellent modern studies of conditions and trends that prevailed in North Africa before Heraclius. It terminates with the end of Byzantine political and military authority in North Africa at the end of the seventh and the beginning of the eighth century, even though important Christian communities persisted in North Africa for many more centuries, and even though the consolidation of effective Muslim political and military authority would be difficult and far from complete.

The study of dynamics involves the investigation of processes of and dimensions of forces that produce activity and change. The focus will be on processes of conflict, some of which were violent,¹² and cumulative military, political, and religious change in power¹³ in that portion – the most important portion in Antiquity – which the Romans called “Africa” and many Arabs derivatively called “Ifriqiya,” roughly what is now Tunisia and adjacent eastern Algeria.¹⁴ Isidore of Seville described Roman or Byzantine North Africa’s regions in antiquarian terminology and its inhabitants pejoratively in ethnic stereotypes: Afri (North Africans) as “changeable,” meaning unstable, and Numidians as “wandering and errant and without a city.”¹⁵ It is uncertain whether Byzantines shared Isidore’s clichés about North Africa. Byzantine Africa includes the late Roman and Byzantine provinces of Zeugitana (old Africa Proconsularis), Byzacena (or Byzacium) “rich in oil and so rich in its soil that seeds that are sown there return a crop nearly a hundredfold,”¹⁶ Tripolitania, and Numidia, including to a modest extent what had once been Mauretania Sitifensis and Mauretania Caesariensis.¹⁷ Byzantine North Africa is vast (see Map 1). The core of what is under investigation lies in modern Tunisia, according to official

¹² Varieties of violence in Drake 2006.

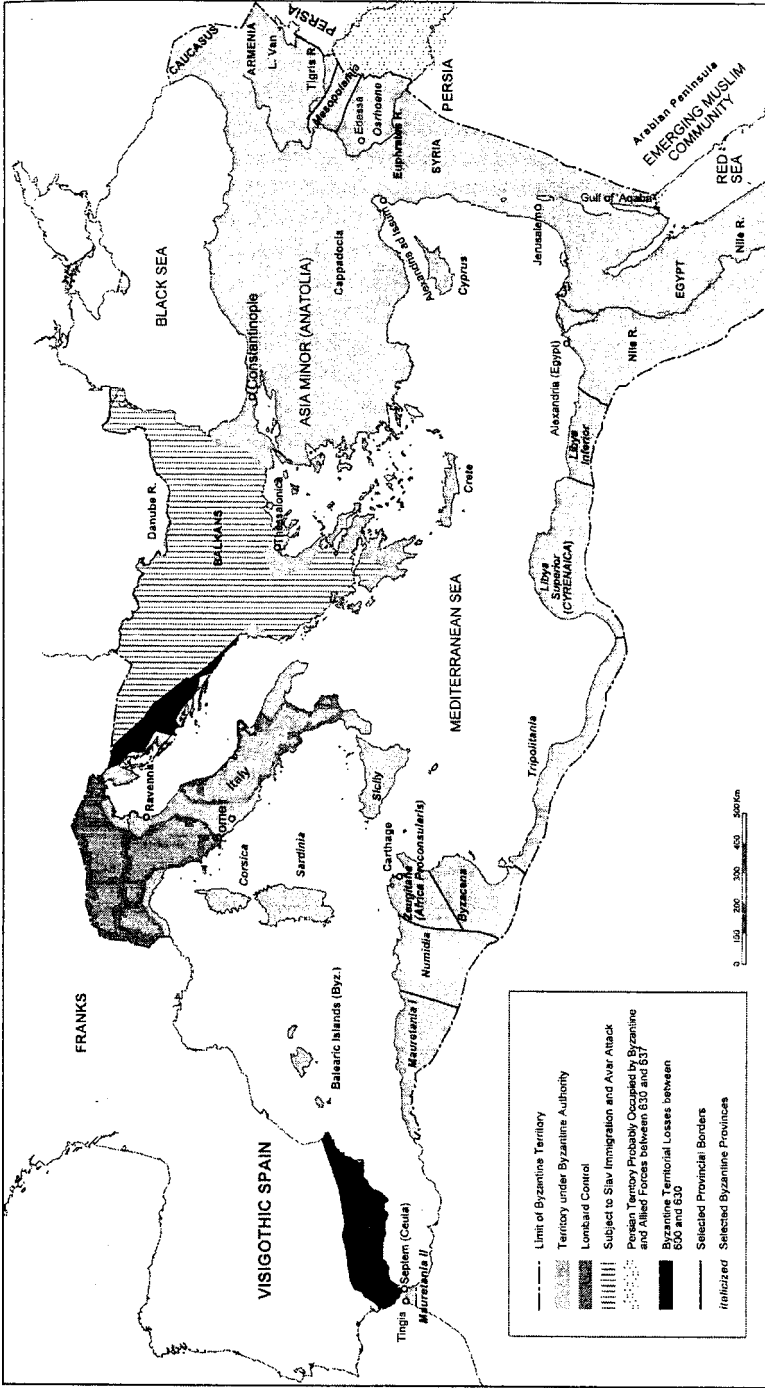
¹³ Useful definition of power: Morgenthau and Thompson 1985: 32, “When we speak of power. . . we mean man’s control over the minds and actions of other men. By political power we refer to the mutual relations of control among holders of political authority and between the latter and the people at large. Political power is a psychological relation between those who exercise it and those over whom it is exercised.”

¹⁴ Mattingly and Hitchner 1995.

¹⁵ Regions: Isidore of Seville (Barney *et al.*): 14.5.3, p. 292. Peoples: Afri, Isidore of Seville (Barney *et al.*): 9.2.105, p. 198; Numidia, Numidians, 9.2.121, 14.5.9, pp. 199, 292.

¹⁶ Isidore of Seville (Barney *et al.*): 14.5.7, p. 292; Durliat 1999; Desanges, sv. “Byzacium,” *EB* 1674–77.

¹⁷ Definitions: Troussel 1985: 363–4.



Map 1 The Byzantine Empire in 630, on the eve of the Islamic conquests

Tunisian claims, but includes coastal parts of modern Libya and much of eastern Algeria. The provinces of Numidia and Sitifensis in fact will receive more attention than they normally have in assessments of the Muslim conquests. The earliest Muslim conquests took place in those North African regions that the Byzantines and Romans had controlled, areas that lay closer to but not necessarily on the edge of the Mediterranean. Only later would there be profound alterations further to the south and west.

The problems of the Byzantine territorial remnant of modern northern Morocco that lies opposite Gibraltar, the province known as Mauretania II Tingitana, are important but really more part of the history of the end of Visigothic and the beginning of Muslim Spain, and therefore not a main concern here.¹⁸ The conditions there are poorly documented as is the political, ecclesiastical, and military situation in the regions of what remained of the province of Mauretania I Caesariensis, in central and western Algeria, which lay largely outside of effective Byzantine control. The historian can say little about them here.¹⁹ Nevertheless this inquiry includes some discussion of what happened in northern Morocco. Muslims built intra-regional relationships in North Africa on a scale that did not exist in the classical and Byzantine eras. But that is for Islamicists to elaborate and is beyond the scope of this study.

DISCIPLINARY PERSPECTIVES

The frame of reference for this investigation is that of a Byzantinist and specialist on Late Antiquity who also has tried to investigate and assess Arabic, especially Muslim, sources, for early Islamic history. This is a study in Byzantine history as well as one in North African history. Responsibility for the loss of North Africa was a major political as well as religious issue for the imperial court and its opponents. Maghribi critics may even wonder whether imperial Byzantium receives too much attention and whether there is too much history from the top down. It is essential to understand how events and developments were part of the broader history of the Byzantine Empire and the degree to which imperial and North African interests and perspectives both did and did not coincide. Yet notions of edges and marginality are mutable. Margins are made and not born.²⁰

¹⁸ Vallejo Girvés 1993; Siraj 1995; Collins 1989; Villaverde Vega 2003; Arce 2005: 341–51; Moreno 2002.

¹⁹ Jaidi 1977.

²⁰ S. Alcock, "Making margins: From Achaia to Armenia," paper delivered at the Program in the Ancient Mediterranean World Inaugural Conference "At the Edges of Empire: Interpreting

Other problematics of terminology require a few words.²¹ This investigation involves military operations without any intent to make any value judgment on events. Although I am a Byzantinist, I do not seek to take the side of Byzantium, nor is this any apology for a Byzantium that made so many inept mistakes in its North African political and military policies. This is not a Eurocentric history in which "the most significant feature of Byzantium lies in its historic role in protecting the Christian West in the early Middle Ages."²² The use of the concept of "invasion" or conquest does not intend to imply any moral judgment on the Byzantine-Muslim struggle for Africa in terms of right or wrong.²³ I do not use the term *invasion* or *conquest* with respect to any value judgment, merely to denote the fact of offensive military operations conducted by Muslim military commanders against the Byzantines, who held territorial control after their reconquest of North Africa in the 530s. Sound Muslim Maghribi historians such as 'Abdulwahid Dhanūn Tāha, Hichem Djaït, Mohamed Talbī, and Mohamed Benabbès use the concept of conquest.²⁴ Military operations and some battles or, perhaps more accurately, armed clashes and skirmishes, did occur, although there were also many important cases in which Muslims successfully utilized diplomacy to woo autochthonous (local) people in North Africa to their side without significant bloodshed.

With respect to methodology, unlike historians of the late nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth, today's historians give less attention to institutions.²⁵ There is another methodological problem, the neglect of military history and the military dimension in history.²⁶ One cannot understand the Muslim conquest of North Africa exclusively in terms of religious, social, and cultural experiences. But continuity existed in longer-term processes. Broader religious, social, and economic trends

the Marginal Areas of the Roman World," The University of Chicago, February 17, 2006. Unpublished.

²¹ Lively discussions with historians of the faculty of history at the Faculty of Letters, University Mohammed V-Casablanca, Morocco, on January 27, 2005 alerted me to these issues.

²² Herrin 2007: xviii. A recurring simplistic theme that I. Ševčenko ably criticized in his 1968 *Slavic Review* 27: 112 book review of the second edition of vol. IV of the *Cambridge Medieval History* (1966): "The great J. B. Bury wore blinkers, too, when he declared Byzantium's chief political function to have been that of the bulwark of Europe against Asiatic aggression (pp. xv-xvi [of the 1923 first edn. of *CMH*]). However, in 1923 it was more difficult to escape cultural self-centeredness than in the 1950s."

²³ I am aware of the sensitive reactions that the term *conquest* can elicit in the Maghrib and in fact I have experienced them myself in making oral presentations.

²⁴ Tāha 1989; Djaït 2004: chapter "La conquête arabe du maghreb (27-86 H./647-705 ap. J.-C.)," 11-34; Talbī 1990; Benabbès 2004.

²⁵ But see Wood 1989.

²⁶ Kaegi 1981a and 1981b; Henniger 1999; Le Bohec 2007; Loreto 2006.

were gradually transforming North Africa before and especially after the events of the seventh-century conquest and collapse of Byzantine authority. Some may believe with justification that those longer trends, shifts, and continuities are more important and more interesting than the conquest itself. However a conquest took place and Muslim sources use the term *conquest*. One must try to understand seventh-century warfare.²⁷ It is wrong moreover to envisage those wars as popular or revolutionary or guerilla wars of the kind that have been common in the twentieth and twenty-first century. One cannot excise the military dimension from history.²⁸ But this study requires the investigation of military politics or military unrest as well as military strategy and tactics, for a multitude of considerations affected events and outcomes. As in the case of the initial Byzantine reconquest in the sixth century, spheres of religion and military matters overlap and interact. A process of narrative reconstruction is necessary.²⁹

In order to understand the situation in Byzantine North Africa it is essential to appreciate the politics and the perspectives of Constantinople, the capital of the Byzantine Empire. It was the Byzantine Empire whose emperor and subordinate commanders directed the available military forces in Numidia, Africa Proconsularis, Byzacena, and Tripolitania. It was receiving information, however distorted, from Syria about the Muslims and their potential and their intentions. Like it or not, Constantinople conceived its strategy and policies for North Africa in a larger framework. Its strategy was part of a bigger picture that stretched from Armenia to the Maghrib. Its framework presupposed the defense of maritime interests that included critical ports in Sicily and Sardinia and southern Italy. It was Constantinople's leaders who had diplomatic and military relations with Muslims in Syria. The first goal of the Byzantines was the defense of Constantinople and Anatolia, not North Africa. Yet without approval and intelligence and resources from Constantinople, there could be no viable defense of Byzantine North Africa.³⁰ However imperfect it was, Constantinople was constantly receiving information and trying to make

²⁷ Halsall 2003, including numbers (soldiers) 119–33, and battle: 177–214. See also Haldon 1999; DeVries, "Medieval warfare and the value of human life" in Christie and Yazigi 2006: 27–55. Syväne 2004 is a selective, learned, and arbitrary overview that halts with the battle of Yarmūk in 636, without explaining that terminus. He gives little attention to North Africa. Methodological problems with some historiography of the face of battle: Wheeler 1998 and 2001.

²⁸ Remarks of Kaegi 1995: 17–18.

²⁹ Heather 2005: xiv judiciously comments that "... it is vitally important not to lose sight of narrative in the midst of the current emphasis on ideology and perception, much of it inspired by recent trends in literary criticism," also 436, 446.

³⁰ Important collection of recent scholarship: *LAfrique Vandale et Byzantine* (part 1), which fills most of *AT* 10 (2002), and the 2nd part in vol. 11 (2003).

sense out of political and military intelligence about rising Muslim power in western Asia, Egypt, and adjacent regions.

Political and military leaders and advisers in Constantinople misunderstood North Africa's autochthonous peoples when conceiving and initiating the Byzantine reconquest of Africa in 533–4.³¹ Byzantine historians of the reconquest and most notably the sixth-century Procopius of Caesarea wrote about autochthonous North Africans without breaking out of older and misleading literary and cultural stereotypes.³² Twenty-first century historians in their turn must try to avoid stereotypes about autochthonous North Africans that bedeviled Roman, Byzantine, and colonial historiography, even though that may not be easy to do.³³ The controversial topic of ethnicity receives most judicious handling in recent scholarship, which readers should consult.³⁴

This inquiry represents the results of an effort to reread Arabic, Byzantine, and Latin literary texts on the Islamic conquests in North Africa in the light of the latest research in several disciplines: history, religion, archaeology, numismatics, and Late Roman, Byzantine, and Islamic toponymics. I have tried to investigate terrain as much as political conditions have permitted. It is unrealistic to expect any quick solution to all of the problems, but scholarly knowledge of archaeology, source criticism, and historical methodology and of Byzantinology, Early Islamic studies, and Late Antique studies is so different today from what it was at the end of World War II that it is worth trying to reread the sources with a fresh eye.³⁵ Each of these specialities in turn continues to evolve. It is improbable that this interpretative essay will satisfy specialists in every field who have their own respective criteria. But this is an effort to synthesize a remarkable and admirable amount of new research by others and relate it to researches and perspectives that I have developed.

Conditions are changing. New reasons exist for a reevaluation of this subject. This investigation required consultation of not only Byzantine history but also the pioneering scholarship on Late Antiquity, including its multiple spiritual dimensions, that has revolutionized many fields.³⁶ Late

³¹ Modéran 2003a: 566–84.

³² Kaegi 1990; Averil Cameron 1985; Kaldellis 2004, but see review by Averil Cameron 2004: *AHR* 109: 1621.

³³ The absence of locally written narratives and other documented evidence makes it much more difficult to incorporate autochthonous peoples into history in any rigorous way.

³⁴ Exemplary: Modéran 2003a. Caution about broader historiographical treatment of purported barbarian ethnicities in Late Antiquity and the early Middle Ages: Goffart 2006: 1–39.

³⁵ A different effort by Sizgorich 2009, whose focus is not on North Africa but on Islam and Late Antiquity.

³⁶ A seminal leader in this pioneering work is Peter Brown, some of whose earliest scholarship, including his magisterial biography *Augustine of Hippo* (1st edn. 1967), investigated North Africa.

Antiquity, including its historiography, is better studied.³⁷ So is the seventh century. As part of this process, the Muslim conquests in the Levant are beginning to be understood better, although many problems remain.³⁸ Efforts have begun to understand gaps and differing methodologies and to try to synthesize Late Antique, Early Islamic, and Byzantine History – simply put, to try to see interrelationships. Excellent topographical contributions have improved knowledge of the sites and terrain.³⁹ Imperative is a reappraisal of many dimensions of North African history including North Africa's relations with Europe and western Asia.⁴⁰

This is an attempt to reexamine materials in the light of new discoveries about seventh-century Byzantium and about Byzantine relations with Arabs and Muslims in the seventh century, and with respect to changing interpretations of broader conditions in the Late Antique world of the seventh century. It draws on research from Late Antique, Byzantine, and Early Islamic fields in an attempt to develop a critical historical synthesis. This is not easy to accomplish. Readers have a challenging spectrum of expectations to satisfy.

Travel and familiarization with relevant terrain and archaeological sites preceded synthesis. Basic is the very old and unspectacular methodology of intensive, wide, patient, and attentive reading of diverse sources and modern scholarship in order to find, collate, and synthesize: *Lesefrüchte* or *notes de lecture* or notes from reading. It was then possible, after extensive discussions with Early Islamicists, Maghribi historians and students, and Byzantinists, to make new connections and identify unnoticed relationships over time and space, and to understand better which questions remain.

Many lacunae remain. In the future, team research may be necessary instead of individual historians preparing isolated narratives and monographs to accomplish this task of understanding North African history. It is desirable to accelerate and improve scholarly collaboration between disciplines that have become intensively specialized and separated.⁴¹

He contributed many valuable insights on issues of society, culture, and spirituality. See e.g., Brown 1968; 1972; 2000.

³⁷ Retrospective and a peek ahead: Straw and Lim 2004.

³⁸ Donner 1981; Kaegi 1995; Kaegi 1998; Kennedy 2007, chapter "Into the Maghreb," pp. 200–24, surveys the Muslim conquest of North Africa. Sijpesteijn 2007a: 437–59. Standard older narrative on Egypt: Butler 1978. Survey of the conquest of North Africa in Churkakov 1958; Mones 1988: 224–45. Papers in Averil Cameron 1995.

³⁹ French scholars such as Pol Troussset, Noel Duval, Jean Laporte, and Michel Christol have pioneered in topographical scholarship.

⁴⁰ Horden and Purcell 2000.

⁴¹ Insightful and beautifully illustrated *tour d'horizon*: Pentz 2002.

Table 1 *Muslim expeditions and Byzantine actions: an overview*

The following events affect or form part of the sequence of seventh-century Muslim expeditions into Byzantine North Africa (here without any extensive analysis or commentary):

- 535 August 1: *Just. Nov. 37* Prohibition of synagogues and Jewish worship in Africa as part of the settlement after the Byzantine reconquest;⁴² however this law was not continuously enforced in following years.
- 632 May 31 at Carthage: imperial order enforced by the Prefect of Africa for the forcible conversion of Jews.
- 633 Refusal of Peter, General of Numidia and possibly also Exarch of Africa, on advice of St. Maximus the Confessor, to implement an imperial command to move troops from Numidia to rescue Egypt from early invading Arab raiders. At this time compulsory imperial baptism of Jews continued, enforcement of which may have occurred only in Africa.
- 634
(first half) Conversations at Carthage among some Jews and recent Jewish compulsory converts to Christianity concerning news of the appearance of a Prophet among the "Saracens" and their stunning victory over Byzantine forces in Palestine, near the Mediterranean coast.
- 636 Byzantine defeat at Yarmūk, ensuing retreat from Syria and northern Mesopotamia.
- 641 Death of Heraclius, accession of grandson Constans II after much strife.
- 643 Muslims' occupation of Tripoli and vicinity, having finished conquering Egypt in 642.
- 645 Rebellion of Exarch Gregory, who proclaims himself Byzantine Emperor. Muslims in Egypt interrupt raiding westward to crush Byzantine naval expedition that tried to recapture Alexandria and Egypt for Byzantium.
- 647-8 Initial Muslim raid into Ifriqiya (Africa = Tunisia more or less) by 'Abd Allāh b. Sa'd b. Abī Sarḥ, resulting in death of Gregory, at or near Sufetula (Sbeitla), an ensuing fourteen- or fifteen-month interim of local chaos and devastating Muslim raiding, and the imposition of a huge payment of money on African subjects of the Byzantine Empire. 'Uqba b. Nāfi' begins operations against autochthonous tribes.⁴³

⁴² Evans 1996: 240-9.

⁴³ Ibn 'Abd al-Hakam, *Futūh Miṣr wa-akhbārūhā*, ed. C. C. Torrey (New Haven: 1922): 183-4. See also on battle at Sbeitla: Slim 1980.

Table 1 (cont.)

650–652/3	Constans II compelled to pay 1,000 solidi per day tribute to the Muslims in Syria.
653–5	Byzantine military unrest in Sicily. Arrest, trial, and exile of Pope Martin I and, separately, of St. Maximus the Confessor at Constantinople.
656–61	First Muslim civil war (<i>fitna</i>), temporary Muslim truce in Asia with Byzantines.
663	Muslims' initiation of winter campaigns against Byzantines in Anatolia.
665/6	Mu'āwiya b. Ḥudayj's major raid with 10,000 men in southern Tunisia (Byzacena); raids Gabes region, encamped at Qamumiya, near site of later Qayrawān, captures Hippo Diarrhytus (Bizerte). At his direction 'Abd Allāh b. al-Zubayr captured Hadrumetum (Sousse) on the coast, and 'Abd al-Malik b. Marwān captured strategic city of Jallūla (Cululis), controlling access to key passes in Tunisia's Dorsal Range. ⁴⁴ Raiders returned to Egypt. 'Uqba b. Nāfi' al-Fihri captured more desert posts in the interior of modern Libya and southern Tunisia. Imposition of huge tribute on Byzantine North Africa, to which unhappy Constans II reacted by sending own commander to demand his own taxes. ⁴⁵
667/8 CE (AH 47)	Muslim raid by Ruwayfi' b. Thābit and Faḍāla b. 'Ubayd, who successfully assaulted the Byzantine-controlled strategic and commercially valuable island of Jirba from Tripoli, where Mu'āwiya b. Abī Sufyān had appointed Ruwayfi' in AH 46 (666/7). ⁴⁶ Probably related to this expedition: the Pseudo-Methodius <i>Apocalypse</i> reports a destructive Muslim naval raid against the fortified mainland African port of Gigthis (modern Bou Grara, southern Tunisia), which lies opposite the island of Jirba (Jerba). ⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Ibn 'Abd al-Hakam, *Futūḥ Miṣr* (Torrey): 193.

⁴⁵ Ibn 'Abd al-Hakam, *Futūḥ Miṣr* (Torrey): 193–5; al-Tijānī, Abū Muḥammad 'Abd Allāh b. Muḥammad, *Riḥlat al-Tijānī: Tūnis-Tarābulus, 706/708H*, ed. Ḥasan Husni 'Abd al-Wahhāb (Tripoli, Tunis: 1981): 162.

⁴⁶ Al-Bakrī, Abū 'Ubayd b. 'Abd Allāh b. 'Abd al-'Azīz, *al-Masālik wa al-Mamālik*. ed. A. P. Van Leeuwen and A. Ferre (Tunis: 1992) II: 468; Ibn 'Abd al-Barr, Yūsuf b. 'Abd Allāh, *al-Istī'ab fi ma'rifat al-ashāb* (Amman: 2002) vol. 2, p. 405, Mu'āwiya sent Ruwayfi' to Tripoli in AH 46 and he raided Ifriqiya from Tripoli in AH 47 and returned: Ibn Nāji al-Tanūkhī and al-Dabbāgh, 'Abd al-Rahmān, *Ma'ālim al-imān fi ma'rifat ahl al-Qayrawān*, ed. Ibrāhīm Shabbūh (Cairo: 1968) I: 22–3. Ibn Abī Dīnār, Muḥammad b. Abī al-Qāsim al-Ru'ayni al-Qayrawānī, *al-Mu'nis fi akhbār Ifriqiya wa-Tūnis*, (Tunis: 1967): 40.

⁴⁷ *Die Apokalypse des Pseudo-Methodius. Die ältesten griechischen und lateinischen Übersetzungen*. Ed. and trans. W. J. Aerts and G. A. A. Korrekaas 5 (4) CSCO, Whole Vol. 569, Subsidia Tomus 97

Table 1 (cont.)

669	Assassination in Syracuse, Sicily, of Constans II, who had come with elite Byzantine expeditionary force from Constantinople to Italy in 663. His assassination may be a consequence of Byzantine frustrations resulting from the immediately previous Muslim victories in Africa, such as those at Jirba and Gigthis and Cululis. The need to assure a firm imperial succession by Constans II's son Constantine also briefly diverted imperial attention from Africa and terminated major imperial expeditionary efforts to relieve and defend Byzantine Africa.
670	Foundation of Qayrawān (Kairouan) by 'Uqba b. Nāfi' with 10,000 men. Project completed c 675 CE but he is then dismissed. In his raids into Byzantine territory an estimated 80,000 African provincials were reportedly enslaved and carried away. ⁴⁸ Presumably reports of such numbers of enslaved African captives spread terror throughout remaining areas of Romano-Byzantine Africa and beyond.
675	Caliph Mu'āwiya b. Abī Sufyān appointed Maslama b. Mukhallad al-Anṣārī as governor of Egypt. He in turn appointed his <i>mawlā</i> or client Abū'l Muhājir Dīnār as governor of Ifriqiya. Abū'l Muhājir left Egypt with army of non-Arabs. ⁴⁹ He replaced 'Uqba b. Nāfi', with whom he quarreled. Founded town of Tikarwān two miles north of Qayrawān.
678	Second peace treaty with Byzantines, which conceded Byzacena to Muslims while committing Muslims to evacuate Zeugitana/Africa Proconsularis.
679	Abū'l Muhājir's raids into Numidia for two years.
680–692	Second Muslim civil war (<i>fitna</i>) in Syria and Iraq.
681	Caliph Yazīd I, who succeeded Mu'āwiya, reappointed 'Uqba b. Nāfi', who arrived from Egypt with another 5,000 men.
682–4	'Uqba met strong and effective resistance in Numidia from Byzantines at Baghai, where he failed to take the town. So he raided Lamis (possibly Lamasba or Belezma), moved against and crushed combined Byzantine and local forces near Adna (Zabi

(Leuven: 1998) Greek: I: 94, 98, Latin I: 95, 99. Comment. Whole vol. 570, Subsidia Tomus 98 (Leuven: 1998) II: 12, II: 74.

⁴⁸ Theophanes, *Chronographia*, AM 6161, ed. C. de Boor (Leipzig: 1883): I: 352. Ibn 'Abd al-Ḥakam, *Futūḥ Miṣr* (Torrey): 196–8.

⁴⁹ Abū'l 'Arab Muḥammad b. Ahmad b. Tamīmī al-Qayrawānī, *Ṭabaqāt 'ulama' Ifriqiya wa-Tūnis* (Tunis: 1968) includes brief dating of first arrival in Africa in AH 55, second in AH 57. His sources include 'Isā b. Muḥammad b. Sulaymān b. Abī'l Muhājir al-Anṣārī, great grandson of Ibn al-Muhājir. Ibn Abī Dīnār, *al-Mu'nis* 41. On which see Idris 1964: 118.

Table I (cont.)

	Justiniana which is 4 kilometers east of M'sila in what is now the Hodna) and then penetrated westward to Tahart (Tiaret) after which he then allegedly reached the vicinity of Tangier. 'Uqba then reportedly moved southeast to the region of the Sūs al-Aqṣā in Morocco, and on his return was later killed in 684 (or 682/3) near Biskra by the autochthonous chief Kasila (Kusayla) after crossing the former old Roman provincial border of Sitifensis into Numidia at Tubna (Algeria), which once was the seat of the obsolete Count of Africa.
685	Death of Byzantine Emperor Constantine IV, succession of his unstable son Justinian II who reigned until his overthrow in 695 (and then regained power from 705 until 711; the last emperor from Heraclian dynasty). Kasila, the autochthonous commander who had initially converted to Islam, rebelled and occupied Qayrawān between 683 and 686 with a force of Byzantines, Romans, and autochthonous tribesmen. ¹⁰
688	Caliph 'Abd al-Malik b. Marwān appointed Zuhayr b. Qays al-Balawī as governor of Ifriqiya. He brought an army of 4,000 Arabs and 2,000 Berbers from Barqa, decisively defeated and slew Kasila at Mammās, captured the key Byzantine fortress of Sicca Veneria (Le Kef). His forces pursued some fleeing remnants of Kasila's adherents as far west as the Wādī Moulouya. He reoccupied Qayrawān, then returned in order to retake Barqa from the Byzantines who had captured it with a sea raid. ¹¹ But Zuhayr fell in combat against the Byzantine raiders, who probably received aid from local Christians and tribesmen, in the Barqa region of Cyrenaica.
694	Caliph 'Abd al-Malik appointed Ḥassān b. al-Nu'mān al-Ghassānī with 40,000 men, who marched across Cyrenaica in 695, reentered Qayrawān, attacked and temporarily captured Carthage (695/6) and the ports of Hippo Diarrhytus (Bizerte) and the northern region called Satfura. ¹² Brief Byzantine reoccupation of Carthage, with the aid of a relief fleet. Ḥassān retook Carthage in 698, dismantled it, and then began to construct Tunis. Ḥassān then campaigned against the prophetess Kāhina, whom he ultimately defeated and killed (698-703?). ¹³
695	Emperor Justinian II overthrown, mutilated, by usurper Leontius at Constantinople.

¹⁰ Ibn 'Abd al-Hakam, *Futūḥ Miṣr* (Torrey): 200-1; Gateau 1948: 70-3.

¹¹ Ibn 'Abd al-Hakam, *Futūḥ Miṣr* (Torrey): 202-3; Gateau 1948: 74-6. Modéran 2003a: 688.

¹² Ibn 'Abd al-Hakam, *Futūḥ Miṣr* (Torrey): 203-4; Gateau 1948: 76-85. Modéran 2003a: 688.

¹³ Modéran 2003a: 688-9, 794-5.

Table 1 (cont.)

698	Emperor Leontius overthrown by the Drungarios (commander) of the Byzantine Fleet, Apsimar, who abandoned the effort to recover Carthage and Africa, seized power as Emperor Tiberius II at Constantinople. End of any effective Byzantine military resistance or authority in North Africa. Disorganized local resistance to Muslims continues by some autochthonous leaders and groups and localities. Byzantine military command probably temporarily relocated to Septem (Ceuta) or Sardinia after 693/5 or 698.
705	Justinian II regains power at Constantinople, takes revenge on his enemies.
705	Mūsā b. Nuṣayr is sent by the governor of Egypt to conquer northwestern North Africa, which he achieved in the years 705–708/9. He sent his son Marwān to capture and rule Tangier (Roman Tingis, Arabic Tanja). ⁵⁴
708	Mūsā b. Nuṣayr sends another son 'Abd Allāh to raid the Balearic Islands.
711	Justinian II overthrown for second time, executed, together with his son. End of Heraclian dynasty. Kaleidoscopic violent successions in following seven years of imperial contenders Philippicus Bardanes, Anastasius II, Theodosius III, and Leo III hinder any conceivable effort to send military help from Constantinople to North Africans.
711	Ṭāriq b. Ziyād is appointed by Mūsā b. Nuṣayr and is given command of Muslim armies to lead an expedition into Spain. This occurred after Muslim penetration into northwest Africa, namely, initial occupation of strategic points in western Algeria (parts of former province of Mauretania I Caesariensis) and northern Morocco (Mauretania II Tingitana), including the strategic ports and former Byzantine strongholds of Tangier (Tingis) and Sibta (Roman Septem, modern Ceuta), the second of which had been under the control of (?Count) Julian who held it as some kind of a dependency from the Visigoths in Spain. ⁵⁵

⁵⁴ Ibn 'Abd al-Ḥakam, *Futūḥ Miṣr* (Torrey): 203–5.

⁵⁵ Ibn 'Abd al-Ḥakam, *Futūḥ Miṣr* (Torrey): 205–6.

CHAPTER 2

Historiographical hurdles

COMPARISONS AND CAUTIONARY OBSERVATIONS

Cautionary remarks are in order. Charles-André Julien aptly commented and warned in the first edition of his fundamental *Histoire de l'Afrique du Nord*:

The "perfidious Maghreb" is no less hostile to historians than to conquerors. Instead of opening the harmonious perspectives of gardens in the French style, it lures them into sterile lands where they wander, erects obstacles in front of them that they must bypass in order to give them the illusion of conquering them, and confronts them with terrae incognitae on the edge of which it is necessary to lose all hope.¹

Another eminent and learned historian, in this case of Roman North Africa, Charles Saumagne, wrote too pessimistically, in his little-known review of the first edition of Julien, *Histoire de l'Afrique du Nord*, of the transition between ancient and Islamic periods and sources:

Suddenly, it seems that the sources for the history of North Africa thin out, disappear, as though reabsorbed by oblivion under the cover of the sand dune. Here and there, as though a breath of fresh air, the flowering of an exceptional intelligence halts the steps of the historian. He will slow down there distraught, then he will resume his way, beyond the oasis, across long lonely space where the hope of a resting place dissolves into a mirage.²

¹ Julien 1931: xiii.

² Copy in C. Saumagne's compartmentalized personal collection in the Carthage Museum Library, inserted with manual corrections in his own personal copy of Julien's volume, which he published in the newspaper *Dépêche Tunisienne* (January 27, 1932), "A propos d'une 'Histoire de l'Afrique du Nord' I," in his collection in the Carthage Museum Library, inserted with manual corrections in his own personal copy of his review of the first edition of Julien (1931) [clipped], of the transition between ancient and Islamic periods and sources: "Soudain, il semble que les sources de l'histoire d'Afrique se diluent, disparaissent, comme résorbées par l'oubli sous l'ensevelissement de la dune. Décidément, ainsi qu'un vallon de fraîcheur – l'épanouissement d'une intelligence exceptionnelle arrête le pas de l'historien: il s'y attardera éperdument; puis il reprendra sa marche par delà l'oasis, à travers de longues solitudes où l'espoir de l'étape se résoud en mirage." Very few individuals have

It is these kinds of formidable and treacherous challenges that require anticipation in investigating this subject and in writing this book. Admittedly this is not an easy task, for the enterprise has raised many hurdles for very accomplished scholars of other generations.

More than a century has passed since Charles Diehl, the godfather of modern French and for many, non-French, Byzantine Studies, published his fundamental and seminal monograph entitled *L'Afrique Byzantine* (1896), and a century since Maurice Caudel published his much less rigorous study on the Muslim conquest of North Africa. Edward Gibbon devoted little more than an outdated dozen pages of his *History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* to the Muslim conquest.³ Denys Pringle ably investigated Byzantine fortresses, but not the Muslim conquests.⁴ Vassilios Christides published a concise revised sketch of the Muslim conquest of Libya,⁵ but it has received criticism.⁶ There have been acute investigations of Arabic texts, such as the histories of Ibn 'Abd al-Hakam, and al-Mālikī by Hady Roger Idris, but little broader study of the conquests in North Africa that include much knowledge of the Late Roman and Byzantine Empires; that is the limitation of the otherwise very careful study by 'Abd al-Wāḥid Dhanūn Tāha.⁷ Valuable is Mohamed Benabbès' admirably researched reassessment and original synthesis.⁸ There tend to be gaps in interpretation and exposition between those who use the Arabic and those who use the non-Arabic sources and modern scholarship. Benabbès has succeeded in consulting both groups of sources and is well informed on the present state of archaeological knowledge for many Maghribi sites. Hugh Kennedy offers a simple explanation: "Africa became marginal to the Byzantine Empire. More than anything else this explains the failure of Byzantine troops in North Africa to repel the Arab forces: in the end, the imperial authorities simply did not care enough."⁹ Two major collections of scholarly papers on Vandal and Byzantine Africa have appeared in the journal

seen this rare review, which Saumagne, an eminent historian of Roman and Byzantine North Africa, apparently treasured. Omitted in his bibliography in his festschrift, *Mélanges d'Archéologie et d'histoire offerts à Charles Saumagne* (Tunis: 1968): 17–26.

³ Gibbon 1901, v: 459–71, mentioning Sbeitla, 'Uqba, the defeat and death of Kāhina, the fall of Carthage, and the conquests of Mūsā. Caudel 1900b.

⁴ Pringle 1981, rev. edn. 2001. His objective was study of archaeological remains, primarily those prior to the seventh century.

⁵ Christides 2000 concentrating on what is modern Libya. More detailed is Thiry 1995.

⁶ N. Duval 2000.

⁷ Tāha 1989, which is solid and careful, relies too exclusively on Arabic literary texts, without taking into account the latest researches on the broader Late Antique and Byzantine contexts.

⁸ Benabbès 2004. ⁹ Kennedy 2007: 203.

l'Antiquité Tardive.¹⁰ The publication of the magisterial and painstakingly detailed study *Les Maures et l'Afrique romaine* by Yves Modéran significantly advances the investigation of many aspects of Byzantine North Africa and in particular historical understanding of the autochthonous populations and their tribal groupings in the Late Antique and Byzantine era.¹¹ Many contributions in the *L'Africa Romana* international scholarly congresses illumine aspects of Byzantine and Early Islamic and Late Antique North Africa.¹²

It is unnecessary to explain broader institutional and cultural trends and conditions in the seventh-century Byzantine Empire, for which there are fine monographs despite the persistence of many controversies.¹³ It would be redundant to repeat that material even though it is essential to understand the broader contours of developments in Byzantium. I have tried to explain the policies of the imperial government and the ways in which events in North Africa interacted with those elsewhere in the Mediterranean. Some critics may believe that too much emphasis is given to imperial personalities and decision-making from the top down. But this region was part of the Byzantine Empire and it was this empire's armies and officials who had the responsibility for political and military decisions about North Africa's fate. They made their decisions in the face of broader challenges and experiences in southeastern Anatolia from a newly emergent Muslim polity in Syria, upper Mesopotamia, and Egypt.

The investigation of Muslim conquests in the seventh-century Levant differs radically in one aspect from that of North Africa.¹⁴ Many acerbic controversies exist about historical truth in the literary sources concerning the conquests in the Levant (southwestern Asia and Egypt), but that area in the nineteenth century and early twentieth century was the field for Orientalists who were primarily British, German, Dutch, or Italian.¹⁵ The experience of the French occupation of North Africa and in particular the French conquest of Algeria affects the scholarship on Muslim conquests very differently in North Africa. In the Levant, problems of Orientalism may impede historical researches and exposition and understanding. However in North Africa, French colonial experiences cast the framework more explicitly for much of the scholarship and the ways in

¹⁰ *L'Antiquité Tardive*, vol. 10 (2002), and vol. 11 (2003) respectively.

¹¹ Modéran 2003a. ¹² For example, *L'Africa Romana* 15: 2004.

¹³ Most notably, Haldon 1997a.

¹⁴ Broader methodological problems and questions: Conrad 1998: 237–40. Donner 1998, esp. chapter 7 “Themes of hegemony,” 174–83; Donner 2008: xii–xxxi “Introduction.”

¹⁵ Donner 2004, 1981: 5–9.

which questions and hypotheses were originally stated.¹⁶ Colonialism has been a dominant feature of the historiographical context, framework, and thrust. Thus an imperative has been decolonialization of North African historiography with respect to the Late Antique and Byzantine eras as it has been the process for reinterpretation of other periods of North African history.¹⁷ The implications of that colonialist perspective continue down to the present twenty-first century.¹⁸ It of course cannot bear the responsibility for everything, but it cannot be ignored. It is not worth dwelling on it at greater length, for that would be another book, but it is worthwhile to note that fact.¹⁹

Late Antique and Byzantine North Africa is a construction of colonial and orientalist imagination and, to a significant degree, the French army.²⁰ Much of the archaeology of Roman and Byzantine Algeria was an undertaking of the French army with conscious goals of relating the Roman and French occupations and military developments.²¹ The archaeology of Algeria developed under circumstances different from those in other parts of the Maghrib. It produced valuable evidence but within an explicit framework of interpretation. Some underlying historical realities exist, but much is a construction, which requires disassembly, deconstruction, and reconstruction. That difficult and multiform task is not the primary objective of this investigation.²² Others will have to complete that work with care and appropriate sensitivity and avoidance of polemic. It is desirable to move past the issue of colonialism, to put it behind contemporary researches, but some understanding of its dimensions, especially with respect to Algeria, is imperative, however regrettable.²³

One final remark about framework of interpretations is necessary. French and US experiences of the diplomacy and military operations against Italy and Germany in French North Africa in the 1930s and during World War II have altered historical perspectives and appreciation of the strategic geography of Tunisia and eastern Algeria for historians who investigate seventh-century defenses of North Africa against invaders who came from Egypt. Those French and US perspectives may well differ

¹⁶ Acute review: Modéran 2003a: 1–23. ¹⁷ Mattingly 1996.

¹⁸ Valuable insights from an excellent French investigator of Late Antique North Africa: Lepelley 2004, in Straw and Lim 2004: 25–32.

¹⁹ On Orientalism, in addition to Said 1978, Irwin 2006 is an overview with little reference to North Africa.

²⁰ An excellent French corrective to the older historiography is the insightful introduction by Modéran 2003a: 1–23, also 614.

²¹ I owe this point to Professor Y. Aibeche of the Department of History, University Mentouri Constantine, Algeria. Lorcin 1995: 99–117.

²² Shaw 1980. ²³ Trumbull 2005: 28–32.

from those of British and German historians of the same seventh-century events. Historians who contemplated those campaigns and the geography in 1871, 1900, and even in 1919 did not have the frame of reference of their historical successors who could not ignore the searing events of 1942 and 1943. One cannot overstress or simplistically interpret seventh-century events in the framework of the twentieth century, but some North African experiences of 1942–3 give additional meaning to those of the seventh century.

COLONIALIST FRAMES OF REFERENCE

Historical inquiry by early scholars on ancient North Africa emphasized gaps between North Africa and France: "France is a country of harmony and equilibrium. It is not the same in Barbary."²⁴ The same learned Stéphane Gsell pronounces his judgment: "Africa received more than it gave. Incapable of joining all of their strengths under one roof, to found an empire and to create a civilization which would be their own, the inhabitants accepted or experienced material supremacies and moral influences that were successively offered to them."²⁵ These are observations from some of the best scholars who investigated and reported on North Africa. Such kinds of remarks led others who possessed fewer talents to more simplistic and negative conclusions about seventh-century events and their consequences. Some of the colonial-era publications display as much ignorance of Byzantium as of Islam; one switches from a grossly distorted picture of Byzantium ("a continual succession of crimes and assassinations") to terminate with the blunt political colonial solution for, in their terms, the troublesome Berber population and Berber question: "the peaceful and progressive pushing back that the superior races, alone, know how to accomplish by their system of colonization."²⁶ This kind of colonialist tone permeates some of the historical perspectives of some scholars at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth. Subsequent historical investigations have provided a more sensitive analytical framework.

²⁴ Gsell 1972: 1: 25. "La France est un pays d'harmonie et d'équilibre. Il n'est pas de même de la Berbérie."

²⁵ Gsell 1972: 1: 39.

²⁶ Médina 1901: 418–25; first quotation on Byzantines: p. 425, second quotation from p. 427, "le refoulement pacifique et progressif que les races supérieures savent, seules, effectuer par leur système de colonisation."

According to the historian Maurice Caudel at the start of the twentieth century, the explanation for the Muslim conquests in North Africa was simple: "The impotence of the Byzantine, the ineptitude of the Berber, the agility of the body and the mind of the Arabs explain to us the success of the Muslim incursions in the provinces of Africa in the seventh century."²⁷ But for Caudel, in 1900, there was another objective for his investigation: "At the bottom, it was a question of knowing which one, the Berber or the Arab, was the most assimilable to our customs and to our civilization."²⁸ His monograph contains many racist ("essentialist") statements, such as another allusion to Berbers: "The Aryans ask too much from a notoriously inferior race ..."²⁹ He commented: "We are Aryans like the Greeks, and in more than one way Byzantines. The Moor has not changed."³⁰ "We can characterize the Moor in one word: he is unstable."³¹ "The Moor is content to be unstable."³² Caudel, in addition to his evident prejudices, almost naively accepts some Arabic historical narrative traditions while he indicates little critical knowledge of the complexities of Byzantine history and sources.

A serious Orientalist problem in studying the Muslim conquest of North Africa exists, but it is not insuperable. Orientalist assumptions infuse much early scholarship and the framing of historical questions and conclusions. Yet the problem of Orientalism in the historiography of the Islamic conquests in North Africa is different from studying those of Syria, Mesopotamia, and Egypt. Such problems may bedevil historical investigations of the Levant, but not as in North Africa where they are so intimately tied with establishment of French control and the frequent equation of Roman and French identities, policies, and missions. It culminated in Caudel's history of the Muslim conquest in 1900 and in a widely read book published in 1927 by Emile Gautier on the Islamicization of North Africa.³³ Both make unambiguous racialist (and they explicitly use

²⁷ Caudel 1900b: 190: "L'impuissance du Byzantin, le maladresse du Berber, l'agilité de corps et l'esprit des arabes nous expliquent le succès des incursions musulmanes dans les provinces d'Afrique, au VII^e siècle."

²⁸ Caudel 1900b: 23. "Au fond, il s'agissait de savoir lequel, du Berber ou de l'Arabe, était le plus assimilable à nos moeurs et à notre civilisation."

²⁹ Caudel 1900b: 21. "Les Aryens demandaient trop à une race notablement inférieure ..."

³⁰ Caudel 1900b: 87. ³¹ Caudel 1900b: 14. ³² Caudel 1900b: 16.

³³ "*L'homo Europaeus*, l'Aryen, porteur actuel de la civilisation, a des diatribes scientifiques sur la supériorité biologique du grand doliocéphale blond." Gautier 1927: 23. Repeated by Gautier 1942: 23 in his revised, tempered, and retitled version (1942 reprint of copyrighted book from 1937) *Le passé de l'Afrique du Nord: les siècles obscurs*. Again, speaking of inhabitants of North Africa, Gautier 1942: 65: "L'instabilité de notre homme n'est pas la marque particulière de notre homme, mais de sa race, de la société où il vit."

the term race) judgments, coming from their French colonial situations, in making their conclusions. Raymond Peyronnet described North Africa on the eve of the Muslim invasions in this way: "The Berbers are masters among themselves, masters of their future, but they are masters of disorder, in foolishness and incapable of building anything solid and lasting. No administrative ranks, no social protection, no security. Political anarchy is at its apogee."³⁴

H. Leclercq even proudly editorialized in his encyclopedic entry in the *Dictionnaire d'Archéologie chrétienne* on the Roman imperial site of "Lambaesis" that there was an identification of Roman and French armies in Africa with archaeology: "There is between the former masters of Africa and us, who have become the masters of it, a solidarity that we must honor. Those who the natives call *roumis* are in their eyes and must be in reality the descendants and the inheritors of those who so long ago and so gloriously and so usefully governed the country."³⁵ Leclercq states his point with even more clarity on the following page in his reference to Roman and French armies: "For the two armies the task is similar, the patience, the courage and the intelligence are equal, the adversaries are the same."³⁶

P. J. André expressed comparable sentiments at the end of World War I: "The war of 1914-18 showed that France was the worthy continuator of Rome in colonial policy ... Our methods, derived from the Roman ones ... are shown to be good ..."³⁷ André attributes the success of Islam to the presence of the Christian sect of Arianism in Africa among Berbers: "It is that which explains the success of Islam, recognizing Jesus as a prophet brought Mohammad as only one more prophet, a simplistic religion and a means of struggle against dominators."³⁸ When Arabs invaded North Africa, according to him, "they had no difficulty in driving out of Africa the weak forces of the Byzantine counts who had neither the time nor the necessary authority to strengthen their relationships with the Berbers."³⁹

Earlier residents of French Algeria such as the Constantinois Ernest Mercier viewed North Africa and the arrival of Arabs through the lens of French-autochthonous relations. Writing in 1895-6 he declared that "we have understood the native problem better than our predecessors and

³⁴ Peyronnet 1924. ³⁵ Leclercq 1928: 1073. ³⁶ Leclercq 1928: 1074.

³⁷ André 1922: II: 314. "La guerre de 1914-18 a démontré que la France était la digne continutrice de Rome en politique coloniale ... Nos méthodes, dérivées de celles de Rome ... se sont démontrées bonnes ..."

³⁸ André 1922: II: 115, n. 1: "C'est ce qui explique le succès de l'Islam, reconnaissant Jésus comme un prophète n'apportait avec Mahomet qu'un prophète de plus, une religion simpliste et un moyen de lutte contre les dominateurs."

³⁹ André 1922: II: 114.

our teachers.⁴⁰ Predictably he attributed part of the failure to resist the Arabs or Muslims to flaws in colonization in North Africa: "the powerful colonization that the Romans had planted there had disappeared."⁴¹ This presentist interpretation of the reasons for Byzantine failure and Muslim success is self-serving and unsatisfactory, but it illustrates some of the pitfalls in the development of historical exposition of the history of North Africa.⁴²

Some French colonialists explained the failure of Roman and Byzantine defense against Muslims as partially due to wrong policies of Roman settlement of their own colonists. This has penetrated some of the historical literature. Thus for Mercier,⁴³ the problem was, "the Romans did not understand the unity of the native population," while "we have understood the native question better than did our predecessors and teachers," and bluntly "we have broken the unity and strength of the native race," and again "The Romans accomplished the conquest without a general plan ... they did not change their method for dominating."

Historians on both sides of the Atlantic Ocean after World War II intensified criticism of old colonial frames of reference. One acute Maghribi revisionist, Abdullah Laroui, interpreted the Muslim as well as Byzantine and Vandal conquests as simply a pattern of "Un Conquerant chasse l'autre" ("One conqueror chases out the other"). He interpreted the Muslim conquest as more of an imitation and continuation of earlier ones than any profound change.⁴⁴ Two UCLA dissertations in history explore some aspects of the Orientalist distortions in the historiography of the Muslim conquest and Islamicization of North Africa.⁴⁵ To a lesser but still perceptible degree, Orientalism influenced the early historiography

⁴⁰ Mercier 1895-6: 194. ⁴¹ Mercier 1907: 68-9.

⁴² Malarkey 1984, critically but not always adequately surveys the political and colonial aims and activities of the Archaeological Society of Constantine, Algeria: in Vatin 1984. Also, Lorcin 1995: 194-5, 201-15.

⁴³ Mercier 1895-6: 193-5, "La population indigène de l'Afrique sous la domination romaine, vandale et Byzantine," "the Romans did not understand the unity of the native population," p. 193, "we have understood the native question better than did our predecessors and teachers," p. 194, "we have broken the unity and strength of the native race," p. 195. "The Romans accomplished the conquest without a general plan ... they did not change their plan for dominating ... p. 193.

⁴⁴ Laroui 1970, 2nd edn. 2001: 68; also 21-31, 80-2.

⁴⁵ Abuswa 1984 sharply criticizes the explicit racial framework and judgments of much French scholarship on the Muslim conquest of North Africa. Despite his somewhat polemical tone and the typographical errors scattered throughout his pages, Abuswa convincingly points out some very disturbing passages and outlooks in previous historiography on North Africa. Similar approaches and criticisms in Kabra 1994: 37-87, her chapter 1: "Through a glass darkly: the historiographic dilemma of the Hafsid period."

of Byzantine Africa as well, because it appeared and developed with the French occupation.

There is no reason to belabor and list still more of the blunt and harsh sentiments that prevailed at the end of the nineteenth century and during the initial decades of the twentieth century. That would be beating a dead horse. Yet they formed much of the intellectual context in which the initial modern historiography and reflection about the Muslim conquests and the end of North African antiquity and its Byzantine era emerged and took form. They seem to have peaked in the 1920s. It is necessary to be mindful of them and control for these assumptions while acknowledging nevertheless an enormous scholarly debt to the early French settlers and military officers and administrators in North Africa for identifying, recording, investigating, and preserving Late Antique and Byzantine monuments and inscriptions, many of which have subsequently disappeared or decayed. The best and most painstaking scholarship on North Africa over the decades has been French.

DEFICIENCIES WITHIN ANTI-COLONIAL CRITIQUES

The nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were not the only ones with flawed frames of reference, for newer historiographical misconceptions and foibles create still more pitfalls for investigators in the twenty-first century. A regrettable consequence of Orientalism is the tendency of some historians from the contemporary Maghrib to become dismissive or pay scant attention to the pre-Islamic period. The pain of the colonial era has not disappeared in the Maghrib and still casts a shadow over North African historiography and archaeology. Conflicting perspectives of Arab and Amazigh (autochthonous) historiography add more complications.⁴⁶ Most of what historians seek to recover or reinterpret for the social and cultural history of autochthonous North Africans will have to be discovered through archaeological, palaeo-anthropological, biological, and palaeo-medical analysis in the absence of written texts. It is possible to retrieve some of that submerged history in the future. One must respect the perspectives but exercise caution with respect to undocumented historical claims of Maghribi historians about autochthonous causes, such as Amazigh nationalism, with respect to the seventh century C.E.⁴⁷

⁴⁶ Aadnani, "Berber, or Tamazight," and Gonzalez, "Berbers," in Meri 2006: 103–4, 105–6; McDougall 2006.

⁴⁷ Critique of post-colonial writing: Cooper 2005: 33–55, 115. Cf. Duara 2007: 292–3.

It is desirable that Maghribi historians and archaeologists apply their skills to the investigation and interpretation and reinterpretation of issues in those periods.

Some critics will find insufficient attention here to what they firmly regard as the feeble voice of the majority of the North African population, who they assume would more likely try to throw off what these critics believe was the oppressive Byzantine yoke. They prefer to concentrate more attention on broader and deeper social and economic transformations to create a more accurate picture of how North Africa was really changing. They understandably regard the military lens as only one, and not the most important one, through which to visualize fundamental change in North Africa. They are entitled to their perspectives.

Knowledge of the seventh century is improving concerning mentalities, economy, warfare, institutions, religious life, and political conflicts. The century belongs to both Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages.⁴⁸ Gaps still yawn between investigators who look at Late Antiquity,⁴⁹ Byzantium, and Islam.

Those few scholars who have studied the Muslim conquest of North Africa are primarily Arabists.⁵⁰ Some of them, for their part, have suffered a different deficiency, for they have not understood the Byzantine or Late Antique contexts very well. It is very difficult for Maghribi historians to gain access to the full panoply of modern scholarship on Late Antiquity and Byzantium because Maghribi libraries are very incomplete. Of course not every Arabist who investigated the history of the Maghrib is a Maghribi ('Abd al-Wāḥid Dhanūn Ṭāha is an Iraqi). Financial priorities for research and instruction lie elsewhere. For all of these reasons it is worth attempting to try a critical reexamination, in the light of the latest scholarship on Byzantium in the seventh century and on the Muslim conquests, yet bearing in mind the many pitfalls, which include Eurocentrism, that jeopardize the undertaking.

It is imperative to understand Maghribi events within the larger context of the Byzantine Empire even though that can only be one of several frames of reference. Only then is it possible to understand the nature and reasons for certain Byzantine action and inaction in the Maghrib. Charles Diehl was familiar not only with the latest archaeology in North Africa but also with the state of research and empirical knowledge about Byzantium. Today, regrettably, much otherwise excellent work on North

⁴⁸ Haldon 1997a and Kountoura-Galake 2001. ⁴⁹ Important appraisal: Merrills 2004: 3–28.

⁵⁰ Lévi-Provençal 1954: 17–52; Idris 1964; Brunschwig 1942–7; Gateau 1948; Ṭāha 1989.

Africa displays a lack of familiarity with Byzantium. Maghribi investigators have made many distinguished contributions and advances but sometimes reflect the worst prejudices and faulty logic of earlier western European clichés about Byzantium, which can only hinder accurate historical understanding of Byzantine Africa and the Muslim conquest of it.⁵¹ Even though medieval Muslim geographers often cared little about late Roman and Byzantine toponymics in North Africa, some modern Maghribi scholars have clarified important questions of the transition from Late Antique and Byzantine place names to Muslim ones.⁵² Byzantium is probably even more poorly understood in the Maghrib than in the Mashriq, the Muslim Levant, where more of a tradition of Byzantine and Late Antique studies exists especially in Syria, Lebanon, Palestine, Egypt, and Israel. Byzantinists working on North Africa for their part must develop better knowledge of the specifics of North African history and geography and must understand the perspectives of Maghribi historians and archaeologists.

Maghribi historians need to understand their Late Antique and Byzantine periods in their own regions but also the broader contours of Late Antique and Byzantine history so that they can better interpret their own history. They need to understand the world as seen from Rome and Constantinople and Syracuse even though it may be distorted and even repugnant. Such labors can affect the historical understanding of the Muslim conquests in the Maghrib as well.⁵³ The Byzantine period (in two senses: Byzantine history in general or Byzantine Era in North Africa) normally receives very little time or priority in the Maghribi university class curriculum.⁵⁴ In academic circles it is usually regarded as a transitional period that must cede priority to other periods and subjects. Greek and Latin receive little or no study. North Africa likewise receives little attention in European or North American university courses. Maghribi historians who know Latin or Greek have acquired it on their own or through study abroad. The absence of adequate Maghribi instruction in Greek and Latin is another reason for

⁵¹ Laroui 1970: 83 in his otherwise noteworthy book unfortunately reverts to long-discarded and harmful and distorting concepts when he speaks of Byzantium in terms of "décadence réelle (celle de Byzance)."

⁵² Jaidi 1977.

⁵³ Conversation and observations made to me by Professor Jabar Abd an-Nasr, History Department, University Mentouri Constantine, Algeria, March 9, 2005 after my lecture in his class.

⁵⁴ Exceptions are Professor Mohammed Tahar Mansouri in Mendouba, Tunisia, Mohamed Benabbès at Université 9 Avril, Tunis, and Youcef Aibeche at the University Mentouri Constantine, Algeria.

historians who lie outside of the Maghrib to undertake these kinds of historical investigations.⁵⁵

Profuse discussion of mentalities is the norm today, but that is not easy to accomplish in any convincing way for seventh-century Byzantine Africa. The modern historian cannot penetrate seventh-century North African minds with hope of accuracy. North Africa is large. Perspectives and experiences varied enormously from its eastern to its western regions, and from its coastlines to its interior countrysides. Constantine (Constantina) is not Carthage and Sbeitla is not Sitif or Septem (Ceuta). North Africans speak very rarely about their opinions in the literary and non-literary sources of the seventh century. Byzantine chroniclers, who lived far away, may label the North Africans *Afri* (Greek *Aphroi*),⁵⁶ but the Africans do not express their real opinions except for their loyalty to the Catholic Church. The church itself voices, through an author in the papal biographical compendium entitled *Liber Pontificalis*, the complaints of African and Sardinian landholders. For twenty-first-century historians, the task seems overwhelmingly difficult: no cadasters, no reliable statistical figures, no contemporary memoirs, very little correspondance, and no archives. Inscriptions say a little about cult sites and prosopography, nothing significant about seventh-century events. As is typical elsewhere with respect to the seventh century, literary sources are fragmentary, for the most part not contemporary, and their perspectives seldom reflect those of North Africa and its inhabitants whether rural or urban. But total pessimism is excessive. This is an attempt to bridge at least some of the gaps between Byzantine, Late Antique, and Islamic historical sources and their respective methodological problems.

There will be readers who understandably may be uneasy or dissatisfied with the absence of absolute historical certainties for some of the historical events and processes under investigation. Frequently the historian of seventh-century events and conditions in any corner of the Byzantine Empire must cope with gaps in the sources. Resort to inferences and the weighing of probabilities understandably may irritate some readers. That is a burden of historians who investigate the seventh century. The historian needs to assess hypotheses and probabilities without making absolute

⁵⁵ Financial and educational priorities in an era of scarce resources have caused this gap. Perhaps that grave omission can be remedied in the future, but in the meantime the responsibility for historical interpretation of Byzantine Africa remains important for those historians who have bases outside of the Maghrib. The subject cannot be exclusively one for Maghribis to investigate and narrate.

⁵⁶ J. Peyras, sv. "Afri," *EB* 208-15.

statements that are insupportable. It would be harmful to pretend that precision and certainty exist when the evidence is insufficient. The qualifying word *probably* prefaces many conclusions in this work. One cannot expect too much. On the other hand, unbridled deconstructionism, rejectionism, absolute skepticism, and hopeless abandon of any research into the seventh century are unwarranted.⁵⁷

One prominent Maghribi historian, Abdallah Laroui, has judiciously remarked in referring to ancient North Africa, "There is no historian who does not appeal to hypotheses, reconstructions, and finally to political and moral judgments, in order to hide the poverty of our knowledge."⁵⁸ His comment applies also to Late Antique and Byzantine North Africa and to the initial decades of the Muslim conquest in the seventh century CE. Some resort to conjecture is necessary.⁵⁹

Literary methodologies exist for criticizing Muslim oral traditions and their literary transmission, but I am not a literary critic. I am grateful for the difficult spadework that others have performed and thereby lightened my own tasks. I shall not repeat their work here.⁶⁰ Modern oral traditions in Africa about Byzantium are of dubious value for historians.⁶¹ An important criterion in evaluating the credibility of Muslim traditions is whether they fit what we know of the Late Roman and Byzantine context. That is, whether toponymics, official nomenclature, technical words, or other details reflect known seventh-century Late Roman and Byzantine realities. Later medieval or early modern authors cannot invent such technical traces of Late Antiquity, which they would not have understood. Not all of these Muslim traditions are improbable tales.⁶² North African scholars have argued that it is imperative to give serious attention to neglected

⁵⁷ Evans 1999: 220. ⁵⁸ Laroui 1970: 52.

⁵⁹ D. Graf, "Imperialism and the periphery: Language, culture, and identity on the Arabian frontier," Paper presented at The PAMW Inaugural Conference, "At the Edges of Empire: Interpreting the Marginal Areas of the Roman Empire," The University of Chicago, February 18, 2006, unpublished: "As Hobsbawm has observed, if 'grassroots history, history seen from below or the history of the common people' in early modern Europe is possible, it is only by 'constructing a model' to 'work out how such information ought to fit together,' as in a fragmentary jig-saw puzzle, and not as an 'old-fashioned positivist.' In similar fashion, conjecture is a necessary instrument for the interpreter of the pre-Islamic North Arabian texts, constrained of course by solid scientific method and the inherent rigorous demands made by the nature of the texts and the complexity of their language." The situation is somewhat different in North Africa, but Graf's remarks about the need for conjecture as "a necessary instrument" remain valid.

⁶⁰ Differing perspectives: Donner 1998; Robinson 2003; Noth with Conrad 1994; Conrad 2002: 113–56; Elad 2002; Sizgorich 2004; Elad 2003.

⁶¹ Kaegi skeptical review in *AHR* 74 (1968) 1262–3 of the speculative monograph *Africanobyzantina* by Papadopoulos 1966.

⁶² Kaegi 1995: 2–18; Donner 1998. Favorable critical acceptance of early Muslim historical traditions about events further east: Beihammer 2000a.

Islamic traditions⁶³ from Qayrawān in the light of new editions of texts and new source criticism.⁶⁴

It is imperative to examine more fully the Egyptian situation immediately following Egypt's conquest by Muslims at the start of the 640s.⁶⁵ That is the matrix from which the conquerors of North Africa emerged along with the decision-making processes that gave them opportunities.⁶⁶ To the greatest extent possible, it is desirable to understand the early Muslim leaders in Egypt, their motivations and perceptions, and their alignments and networking. Historians must appreciate how much better documented the Muslim conquest of Egypt is than that of North Africa, even though many desiderata remain even for the case of Egypt.⁶⁷ The competing claims of early Muslim political and religious rivals such as Mu'āwiya b. Abi Sufyān, 'Abd Allāh b. al-Zubayr, Marwān b. al-Hakam and his son 'Abd al-Malik b. Marwān, and 'Uqba b. Nāfi', in addition to interests of the Egyptian and Qayrawānī schools of Muslim traditions, all complicate the interpretation of Muslim traditions about the conquest of North Africa. Early Muslim historical narratives do not give priority to events in North Africa.

A WORD ABOUT MUSLIM, BYZANTINE, AND LATIN SOURCES

The sources are very fragmentary and are scattered and preserved in several languages.⁶⁸ Information about Byzantine–Muslim combat in North Africa is vague in any primary source in any language. Sources seldom provide any precise date, including any specific day of the year, let alone topographical and tactical details, for combats or campaigns there, in contrast to those in the Levant for the battle of the Yarmūk against the Muslims in 636 or the battle of Nineveh (opposite modern Mosul, Iraq) in December 627 against the Persians or others in the seventh century (even though these may be the subject of acerbic scholarly debate). No

⁶³ Important methodologically and valuable for content and conclusions is Benabbès 2004.

⁶⁴ Foremost among these is Hady Roger Idris, for whose numerous valuable and critical publications see the Bibliography for 1935/6, 1964, 1969, 1977.

⁶⁵ Kaegi 1998. Beihammer 2000b.

⁶⁶ Late seventh-century identification (c. 680) of the context for the commencement of the conquest of North Africa with the decisive Muslim penetration into Byzantine Egypt: Robinson 2004: 39.

⁶⁷ P. Sijpesteijn, F. Morelli and N. Gonis are producing important studies of papyri from the earliest period of Islamic occupation of Egypt. Some of their material may have relevance for seventh-century North Africa. Also Sijpesteijn and Sundelin 2004. Important papyri for the earliest Islamic presence in Egypt are preserved in Vienna.

⁶⁸ Averil Cameron 1989.

records exist for any actual muster or logistical expenses in North Africa for Muslims or Byzantines or autochthonous tribes.

Many impediments exist to the study of the Muslim conquest of Byzantine North Africa, which included territory that now lies within the borders of four different states: Libya, Tunisia, Algeria, and Morocco. Apart from formal boundaries North Africa is not homogeneous. It is large with different distinctive regions, climates, and populations. Just as the lack of reliable statistics prevents a satisfactory study of the Late Antique North African economy, the terseness of the sources likewise prevents any real understanding of individual North African biographies and the psychology or military details such as battles and tactics.⁶⁹ Problems of interpreting the contingent element remain serious. The task of the historian is to try to find, interpret, and synthesize these bits of embedded nuggets in the light of physical surface remains and physical topography. It is not easy but it is worth the attempt. Greek, Latin, and Arabic written sources present respective problems of interpretation. "Suspicious retrieval" is a good description of the critical attitude with which the historian should approach these diverse, difficult, and often fragmentary texts.⁷⁰

In contrast to the Muslim conquests of Syria, Egypt, and Iraq, about which many historiographical controversies exist,⁷¹ the Muslim primary sources for the Muslim conquest of Byzantine North Africa are more incomplete, briefer, and less diverse. What one critic has observed with respect to early Muslim historiography in the Levant also has validity for the Maghrib:

as the early Muslim communities recalled the events of the conquest period as episodes in a larger narrative of revelation and prophetic truth, they too imagined scenes in which pious and resolute witnesses to the truth around which their own community cohered stood in confrontation with representatives of worldly power. As they did, the battlefield exploits recalled in tribal or family histories took on an other-worldly glow: they were no longer simply acts of bravery and Bedouin élan. They were manifestations of God's good pleasure on earth and proof of Muḥammad's revelation. They were, in short, the basis for a new community of God.⁷²

Communal memory digests history into a socially constructed constellation of recollected episodes inflected with memory. This constantly evolving communal narrative marked by clear themes explains the imaginative

⁶⁹ DeVries 2004. ⁷⁰ Tilley 1997: 1; Beckman 2005.

⁷¹ Kaegi 1995; Donner 1981; Bonner 2005. On the very early development of historiography in Muslim Syria: Elad 2003. Case for basic credibility: Kennedy 2007: 23–33; Kennedy 2001: 1–17.

⁷² Sizgorich 2004: 38.

basis of identity: namely, how the Islamic community perceived itself, how these self-perceptions informed its historical understanding, and why it developed the identity it did. Islamic imperus created a Muslim community that possessed a communal identity, narrating its past with complex hermeneutical signs and shared experiences. To an extent, these narratives of remembrance celebrated deeds of Muslim holy personages, whose ranks included martyrs, wonder workers, and zealous defenders of the faith.⁷³ But memory does not equal historical knowledge.⁷⁴ Fewer controls exist on sources for events and conditions in North Africa. No historian accompanied Muslim armies in North Africa to record events. Chronology is far from perfect. Of all of those regions, Egypt is the best documented, with papyri and with a contemporary chronicle of John, Bishop of Nikiu, albeit surviving in a later Ethiopic version. But the challenge remains the same for most of the seventh-century Mediterranean littoral, with the exception of Egypt, where papyri give some information about resources for Muslim operations in and near North Africa.⁷⁵ Papyrological sources from Egypt thus far are of limited help in clarifying North African issues.⁷⁶

The earliest extant Muslim narrative account of the conquest of North Africa dates from the late ninth century: Ibn 'Abd al-Ḥakam's History, *Futūḥ Miṣr wa-akḥbārūhā*.⁷⁷ He drew on many Egyptian traditions, such as those collected by Ibn Lahī'a (715–90), whose favor for Ibn al-Zubayr permeates the *Futūḥ Miṣr*.⁷⁸ The sources of Ibn 'Abd al-Ḥakam seem to wish to celebrate the participation and achievements of specific Arab tribes and individuals; therefore one needs to use caution and try to control for this underlying motivation. Various Muslim histories, including not only those written by al-Yā'qūbī (d. 897), Khalifa b. Khayyāṭ al-'Uṣfurī (d. c. 854), and al-Ṭabarī (829–923),⁷⁹ but also later ones such as those of Raqīq al-Qayrawānī, al-Mālikī, *Kitāb riyāḍ al-nufūs*,⁸⁰ al-Nuwayrī, *Nihāyat al-arab fī funūn al-adab*,⁸¹ Abū'l 'Arab Muḥammad b. Aḥmad b. Tamīm

⁷³ Sizgorich 2007, and Sizgorich 2009: 13, 146–7. ⁷⁴ Megill 2007: 17–59.

⁷⁵ But helpful information for the year 703–4 CE: Becker 1911a and 1911b. Bell 1911: 279; Trombley 2004: 207 for expeditions into North Africa and Sardinia.

⁷⁶ However a valuable papyrus palimpsest (merchant's letter in Arabic written over a leaf from an elaborate Latin codex of *Exodus*) attests to early trade between al-Qayrawān and Egypt in the late seventh century: Rāgib 1991.

⁷⁷ Ibn 'Abd al-Ḥakam, *Futūḥ Miṣr* (Torrey); Gateau 1948, retains its value for North Africa and Spain. For skepticism about its traditions and their dependence on later juridical issues: Brunschwig 1942–7, Eng. trans. in Donner 2008.

⁷⁸ Sophisticated evaluation: Khoury 1986: 199–209.

⁷⁹ Background: Donner 1998: 125–46; Kaegi 1995: 8–10. ⁸⁰ Idris 1935, 1969.

⁸¹ Al-Nuwayrī, Aḥmad b. 'Abd al-Wahhāb, *Nihāyat al-arab fī funūn al-adab*, 33 vols. (Cairo: 1964–83), 7–40.

al-Qayrawānī, *Ṭabaqāt 'ulamā' Ifriqiya wa Tūnis*,⁸² and the even later Ibn Abī Dīnār, *Al-Mu'nis fi akhbār al-Qayrawān wa-Tūnis*, all can contribute, but one must use critical judgment when consulting them.⁸³ Al-Ṭabari preserves some otherwise lost traditions compiled by the very learned al-Wāqidi (747–822) whose judgments reflect imperfect historical traditions in Baghdad that are not as accurate for North Africa as his information on Iraq.⁸⁴ But Muslim traditions should not be rejected out of hand.⁸⁵

Some of the Muslim North African traditions at Qayrawān may derive from the era of the conquests, but their extant compilations, such as those of al-Raḡiq, al-Mālīkī, al-Nuwayrī, al-Tijjānī, Ibn Abī Dīnār, and Ibn Nāǧī, date from approximately four to eight hundred years after the critical events.⁸⁶ Such substantial amounts of time can of course distort memories and transmission even beyond the other potential impediments of tendentiousness. References to North Africa are far from detailed in sources on the history of Muslim Egypt. Thus a compilation like al-Kindī's on governors of Egypt will give only occasional mentions of events and persons in North Africa. The principal focus of most extant historiography lies on Iraq and Baghdad. Most medieval Muslim historians were not Maghribi, but wrote from the perspective of Baghdad or Cairo, usually with little or no direct familiarity with North Africa. 'Abbāsīd and post-'Abbāsīd frames of reference often complicate their consultation and utilization as sources. But Muslim traditions also reflect the partisan perspectives of Zubayrid and Marwānid constituencies and their antagonisms and respective claims in the late seventh and eighth centuries, as well as the claims of various later Qayrawānī families.⁸⁷ The modern historian confronts many methodological problems in using these as historical sources. Traditions from Qayrawān have their own baggage and some of it is heavy. It is of course highly regrettable that al-Ya'qūbī's history of the conquest of Africa⁸⁸ is lost. One can only speculate what this generally well-informed historian might have reported.

⁸² Abū'l-'Arab, *Ṭabaqāt*.

⁸³ Idris 1964, 1969 demonstrated the value of the local traditions that al-Mālīkī preserved, contrary to the extreme skepticism that Gateau 1948: 28 expressed.

⁸⁴ S. Leder, sv. "Al-Wāqidi, Muḥammad b. 'Umar b. Wākid," *EP* 11: 101–3.

⁸⁵ Christides 2000: 71 argues that with respect to the history of seventh-century North Africa "caution and critical appraisal of the Arabic sources can usually lead to satisfactory results." Caution in Averil Cameron and Conrad 1992.

⁸⁶ Judicious evaluation of primary sources by Benabbès 2004: 137–76.

⁸⁷ Al-Nuwayrī, *Nihāyat al-arab fi funūn al-adab*, xxiv: 8–10.

⁸⁸ Aḥmad b. Ishāq al-Ya'qūbī, *Kitāb al-Buldān*, ed. M. J. de Goeje, *BGA* 7 (Leiden: 1892, repr. 1967): 352. L. I. Conrad and an international team of investigators are translating and commenting on the works of al-Ya'qūbī.

Al-Nuwayrī, who died in 1333 CE, offers a compilation of events that celebrates North Arabian tribal participation in the Muslim conquest of North Africa. He also underscores the prominence of specific members of notable Umayyad and later Qayrawānī families and clans. His perspective reflects a hardening of retrospective frames of reference after the passage of more than half of a millennium after the decisive seventh-century events. Al-Tijānī, *Rihlat al-Tijānī*, is another fourteenth-century narrative that draws heavily on earlier sources, especially al-Raqīq.⁸⁹

Even greater problems confront the modern historian who consults the preeminent Maghribi historian Ibn Khaldūn, who lived between 1332 and 1406. The seventh century CE and Byzantium are simply extremely remote from Ibn Khaldūn's historical consciousness, overlaid by his own contemporary experiences, memories, conditions, and concerns.⁹⁰ His familiarity with North Africa and his Maghribi identity are great assets but cannot compensate for his lack of knowledge of the seventh century. They are worthwhile but of questionable value for the seventh century itself. From his admirable history the reader can learn what traditions and assumptions were circulating eight hundred years after the events in question. He at least raises the issue of the perspectives of the autochthonous (local) populations concerning developments and conditions.

Of little practical value is the late compilation on Islamic Spain by Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Maqqarī, *Nafḥ al-tib min ghuṣn al-Andalus al-raṭīb*.⁹¹ However fascinating, works such as the early modern geographical treatise and memories of Leo Africanus likewise cannot provide meaningful information about the seventh and early eighth centuries.⁹² Muslim sources (and even some Christian Arabic ones) sometimes conflate and confuse Heraclius with his sons and grandson and great-grandson Heraclius Constantine (Constantine III), Constans II, and Constantine IV.⁹³

The brief extant Byzantine literary sources for their part date from the late eighth and ninth centuries and later and display imperfect acquaintance with North Africa, being very Constantinople-centric. No autoptic

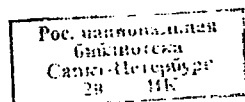
⁸⁹ Al-Tijānī, *Rihlat al-Tijānī*.

⁹⁰ Modéran 2003a: 748–60. Modéran 2006: 159–83 convincingly identified problems and hazards in the utilization of Ibn Khaldūn's history for the era of the conquests. Ibn Khaldūn is primarily valuable for understanding what later Maghribis believed were the conditions and events of the Muslim conquest of North Africa.

⁹¹ Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Maqqarī, *Nafḥ al-tib min ghuṣn al-Andalus al-raṭīb* (Beirut: 1967).

⁹² On which, see the insights of Davis 2006: 98–152.

⁹³ On conflation: Bashear 1991b; Foss 2005.



Byzantine historian left a narrative about seventh-century North Africa, let alone the Muslim conquest of North Africa. However some Greek patristic sources are valuable, such as the works of St. Maximus the Confessor, who actually dwelled and debated for a while in Africa. The early ninth-century *Chronicle* of Theophanes the Confessor contains a few scattered and terse references to North African events, but no coherent narrative. Its sources are controversial.⁹⁴ For its part, archaeological evidence brings little empirical clarification of specific events. Diverse Greek ecclesiastical sources contain bits of information embedded in larger texts that concentrate on other topics.

No record exists of any contemporary Christian historian's attempt to write a coherent history in Greek or Latin or produce a written inquiry or explanation of what happened in seventh-century North Africa, any more than anyone did for what had happened in Syria.⁹⁵ It was a major challenge to try to explain how and why events had unfolded the way they did.⁹⁶ Few Byzantine sources provide any coherent narrative about the crucial reign of Emperor Constans II.⁹⁷ Similarly no Latin historian left a detailed narrative from Sicily, Italy, or Spain. There is no North African narrator of barbarian history comparable to Bede, Paul the Deacon, Gregory of Tours, Jordanes, or even Fredegar.⁹⁸ It would have been difficult and unrewarding to construct a narrative of noteworthy and edifying *exempla* for celebration or imitation by others or a coherent, informative, and persuasive account of God's providential hand in the experiences of seventh-century North African Christians.⁹⁹ It would have been almost as discouraging and probably more risky to compose a narrative about North Africa's seventh-century history from the perspective of Constantinople. Even contemporaries were

⁹⁴ Jeffreys 2004: 133–47. David Woods hypothesizes a Greek source for much of the seventh-century material in this chronicle. He will develop his thesis in his forthcoming publication *The Seventh Century Revisited*. However it is the opinion of Cyril Mango and Lawrence Conrad that a Syriac source, who may be Theophilus of Edessa, may be the transmitter of many references to early Islamic subjects: Theophanes, *Chronicle*, trans. and comment C. Mango and R. Scott (Oxford: 1997): lxxxii–lxxxvii. Also Conrad 1990.

⁹⁵ Olster 1994; Kaegi 1995: 123–287; Croke 2007: 11: 571–3.

⁹⁶ Kaegi, "Initial Byzantine reactions to the Arab conquest," repr. with revisions in Kaegi 1982: XIII: 139–49. Treadgold 2007: 348–9.

⁹⁷ Mango comments in his introduction to his excellent edition and translation of Nicephorus, *Short History* (Washington, DC: 1990): 15 that there is "almost no 'Byzantine' historical material for that period." Negative assessment of Byzantine culture for that era: W. Goffart, "The West Falls, the East Survives: Reconsiderations About the End of Late Antiquity," lecture at The University of Chicago, conference, "Crafting History for the Present: Uses of the Past in the Middle Ages," Illinois Medieval Association, February 18, 2000. Revisionist on Constans II: Zuckerman 2005.

⁹⁸ Goffart 1988: 12–19, 432–7.

⁹⁹ On medieval exemplar theory and rhetoric of historical exposition: Spiegel 2002: 79.

probably confused about what was happening and whether there were any sound solutions. Such literary labors would likely only cause problems for the author with one political or ecclesiastical authority or another. The lack of incentives may help to explain the absence of Christian narratives. The modern historian must try to peer through the discordant perspectives and memories to gain some glimpses and insights into those final, confused moments of Byzantine North Africa.

A principal hurdle for the investigator is the absence of any coherent Byzantine or local Latin narrative of events in North Africa. The Heraclian dynasty probably was too embarrassed to offer an explanation of the loss of North Africa during its hegemony. Its dynastic historians, whoever they were, like the regime itself, sought to deflect responsibility for the loss to others, in particular to scapegoats such as but not limited to St. Maximus the Confessor, Pope Martin I, and other ecclesiastics who allegedly subverted Byzantine and African resistance from the very appearance of the Muslim threat to North Africa. So polemics muddied the historiography of Africa in the seventh century from the beginning. The Catholic–Chalcedonian and Monotheletic Christological dispute overshadowed the formation of any historical narrative. After Monotheletism disappeared following the decisions of the Sixth Ecumenical Council at Constantinople in 680, the actual military and economic situation in North Africa had worsened so badly that Catholics may not have rushed to devise a new interpretation of what had happened, even though they would have blamed Heraclian dynastic errors in judgment. Events were changing too fast. It may have been too embarrassing for anyone to write a narrative in those troubled and desperate times. No historian tried to interpret its recent history as a triumph or failure. This may help to explain the silence.¹⁰⁰ Finally, few traces of the Byzantine occupation of North Africa remained in later Byzantine memory.

There are no extant historical narratives of the conquest of North Africa written by Christian authors in or from North Africa, in contrast to one about the Muslim conquest written, albeit later, by a Christian Egyptian, about the Muslim conquest of Egypt.¹⁰¹ One needs to understand Byzantine Africa on the eve of the Muslim conquest from unusual texts like the polemical *Doctrina Jacobi nuper Baptizati*, which, written

¹⁰⁰ Treadgold, 2007: 348–9.

¹⁰¹ Cf. Den Heijer, “La conquête arabe vue par les historiens coptes,” and later memory: Décobert, “Un lieu de mémoire religieuse,” both in Décobert 2000. In Egypt the non-Chalcedonian church constructed a new identity after the Muslim conquest by developing its own historical record: Papaconstantinou 2007.

in Greek c. 634 CE, does refer to trade, to navigation, and to the forcible conversion of Jews at Carthage, at the beginning of the 630s.¹⁰² The skepticism about the authenticity of the *Doctrina Jacobi* is unwarranted.¹⁰³ The *Doctrina* dates from the seventh century but it does not pretend to be a historical narrative and requires careful and critical reading. This text itself, which refers to events and persons in Africa as well as Palestine, and seventh-century hagiographic texts such as *The Miracles of St. Artemios*, attest to the ties that existed between North Africa and the Palestinian coast in the 630s and earlier, underscoring that events and news spread quickly from one side of the Mediterranean to the other, even in that era of irregular and dangerous travel.¹⁰⁴ North Africa was not cut off from information from the east on the eve of the Muslim conquests. The case of Justus in the *Doctrina* is a reminder that there were a number of disaffected Jews, whether forcibly converted or not, in North Africa on the eve of and during the Muslim conquest. However no source attributes any significant role in the Muslim conquest of North Africa to them. A unique manuscript preserves elements of the Latin African calendar of martyrs from late in the Byzantine period, probably just before the Muslim conquest.¹⁰⁵ Consciousness of their long heritage of martyrdoms remained vivid among North African Christians on the eve of the Muslim conquest. However North African Christians developed no known martyrology of their community during the multi-decade process of the seventh-century Muslim conquest or

¹⁰² *Doctrina Jacobi*, 5,20, ed., trans., and comment. G. Dagron and V. Déroche, "Juifs et chrétiens au VII^e siècle," *TM* 11 (1991): 215, 216, cf. pp. 30–44. See 70–229 for the total edition and translation. Date in late 630s: Averil Cameron 2006: 182. See letter of Maximus the Confessor, *PG* 91: 445. Authenticity of such a decree of forcible conversion accepted by Averil Cameron 1996: 248–74; Cameron 2002; on date and context of *Doctrina Jacobi* 65–7. Broader issues: Jacoby 1993. Holo 2009 offers very useful information on economic activity of Byzantine Jews. Also: Averil Cameron 2003.

¹⁰³ Speck 1997: 457–8, rejected the authenticity of the *Doctrina Jacobi*, among other reasons because of a reference in it to Samaritans, which Speck believed was a Palestinian interpolation from a later century. However references to Samaritans in late Roman and Byzantine anti-Jewish legal documents in fact are standard boiler plate, for they are often paired with Jews irrespective of whether there are likely to be any real Samaritans in a given region. Note reference to Samaritans in legislation against Jews and Samaritans, for example: *Codex Theodosianus* 16.8.16 (404 CE, Rome), 16.8.28 (428 CE, Ravenna). Speck is not convincing. The *Doctrina Jacobi* is not an optimal historical narrative but it is a seventh-century text of great value to historians for information on the seventh century; cf. P. Crone, "What Do We Actually Know about Mohammed?," 2006–08–30, www.llopendemocracy.net.

¹⁰⁴ *The Miracles of St. Artemios*, ed. and trans. V. S. Chrisafulli and J. W. Nesbitt (Leiden: 1997), Miracles 4 and 44, pp. 82–5, 220–1. On the spread of news in Late Antiquity, although without specific reference to the seventh century: M. W. Graham 2006.

¹⁰⁵ Gribomont 1957.

the eighth-century aftermath, and in any case did not hand a usable one down one to posterity.

Latin culture in North Africa retained ties with Latin culture on the northern shores of the Mediterranean and beyond, but few clear traces derive from the seventh century, even though travelers and exiles crisscrossed the Mediterranean.¹⁰⁶ A quarter of a millennium had passed since the days of St. Augustine of Hippo, whose message about the ephemeral and transitory nature of worldly power and glory in his *De civitate Dei* may have had mixed resonances among seventh-century African Christians. Consciousness of Augustine may not have been vivid or relevant anymore to North Africans' needs in the middle of the seventh century. His physical remains had been transported to Sardinia during the Vandal persecutions. Augustine's writings had little influence or impression on seventh-century Byzantine thought in Constantinople or, as far as known, on seventh-century Byzantine officials and soldiers in North Africa.

Muslim sources do not discuss or describe in detail Byzantine institutions in North Africa, nor do they normally even cite Byzantine titulature, except possibly for the vague and often generic term *patricius* and a possible, but improbable, reference to an *aulicus*. According to the profound fourteenth-century historian Ibn Khaldūn the "Franks" (Latins, Romans, and sometimes Byzantines) imposed a certain degree of obedience temporarily on the autochthonous populations of North Africa while these Franks had concentrated their own settlements along the coast. That obedience took the form of Christianity, payment of certain unspecified taxes, and agreement to participate in military expeditions, but otherwise those autochthonous populations strongly resisted the "Franks." In his eyes the Franks were defeated by the Muslims, evacuated their coastal habitations, and fled back overseas whence they or their ancestors, who were aliens from overseas, had come.¹⁰⁷ Neither he nor other Muslim historians provide any detailed explanation of the taxes and institutions that these "Franks" imposed. He either did not know or thought it of no importance to include any description in his history. The testimony of Muslim historians concerning the Maghrib contrasts with the situation in the Levant, where Muslim narrative sources do contain, however confusedly, references to some names of Byzantine commands, such as *drugarios*, *patrician*, and other Late Roman and early Byzantine nomenclature and titulature. So the Muslim sources for North Africa provide at best a more

¹⁰⁶ Sparse evidence in the investigation of S. R. Graham 2005.

¹⁰⁷ Ibn Khaldūn, *Ta'rikh al-'Ibar wa-diwān al-mubtada*. 7 vols. (Beirut: 1956–61), 2003, VII: 10.

opaque and more general picture than was the case in Syria and Palestine. However problematic the Muslim sources may be for Palestine and Syria in the seventh century, those for conditions and events in North Africa are even less specific.¹⁰⁸

Byzantinists have not concentrated on the problem of the Muslim conquest of Africa for a number of reasons:

- 1 Byzantinists' expertise and their priorities for research usually centered on lands further east.
- 2 A dearth of Graeco-Latin sources, scarcity of the early Arabic ones, which have their own major problems, and lack of literacy in Arabic have discouraged many Byzantinists from undertaking such research.
- 3 The relevant archaeological evidence has only just begun to receive appropriate study by historians.
- 4 For its day an excellent and still classic work *L'Afrique byzantine* was written in 1896 by the eminent Byzantinist Charles Diehl, which was so good that no one dared for many years to test or revise his conclusions.¹⁰⁹ He interpreted the situation in Byzantine Africa as one of decline, devoted few pages to the Muslim conquest, but laid out theses about the final century of Byzantine Africa that most Byzantinists did not dare to challenge. He profited from detailed personal investigation of many archaeological sites that were then newly accessible and he developed the framework for describing and interpreting them.
- 5 Denys Pringle finally published in 1981 a solid revisionist study of fortifications as a BAR (British Archaeology Reports) volume: *The Defence of Byzantine Africa from Justinian to the Arab Conquest*.¹¹⁰ He took issue with many of Diehl's earlier conclusions about Byzantine fortifications, but did not study the Muslim conquest and moved on to other archaeological and conservatorial projects that were far away from North Africa.
- 6 Considerations of security and other political problems have long inhibited travel in and knowledge of terrain and sites in Algeria and

¹⁰⁸ Ageil 1985: 57–132. This is a noteworthy survey in a Ph.D. dissertation of the Muslim conquest of North Africa which extensively consults primary sources and modern scholarship in Arabic, but its author makes uncritical use of Byzantine source materials and modern historiography.

¹⁰⁹ Diehl 1896: 312. Even Diehl made some remarks that today seem stereotypically biased about "Berbers": "Toujours prêts à la trahison, sans scrupule ils changent de parti et font défection ... incapables de demeurer fidèles à personne, ils se défont de tout le monde, même des gens de leur propre race ... Par là encore, à l'époque byzantine, les indigènes d'Afrique ont gardé tous les caractères qui distinguaient leurs ancêtres, tous ceux que l'on retrouve chez les Berbères d'aujourd'hui."

¹¹⁰ Pringle 1981.

have often impeded European and American contact with Algerian scholars.

Four broad historical assumptions about North Africa need little discussion. First, the trans-Saharan gold trade is not important at this time, namely, the seventh century.¹¹¹ A collapse of even modest trans-Saharan trade occurred in the late fourth century. Trade did not significantly revive until the Early Islamic era.¹¹² Second, one can leave aside reconsideration of the Pirenne Thesis, except for Michael McCormick's admirable *Origins of the European Economy*. However the Pirenne thesis variant of the medievalist Archibald Lewis, in his *Naval Power and Trade in the Mediterranean*, of a Byzantine-imposed naval blockade disrupting the Mediterranean is an undocumented and quite incorrect one.¹¹³ Lewis' thesis never received careful scrutiny and in any case does not deserve credence. Third, there is no evidence that Vandal-inspired Arianism predisposed the population of North Africa to receive Islam.¹¹⁴ Fourth, and very important, there is a very recent growing consensus of archaeologists that contrary to Charles Diehl, Byzantine Africa was not a story of constant decline in every dimension, whether economic, demographic, or military.¹¹⁵ Regions within it remained healthy even well into the seventh century.

Decolonialization of historiography is primarily the responsibility of Maghribi historians but historians from other countries, especially those that were not directly engaged in the defunct colonial enterprises, can interpret events and developments from an independent perspective.¹¹⁶ Whether that perspective is or can be objective is another matter.¹¹⁷ It is overly simplistic and of little utility to set up and attack colonialist ghosts,

¹¹¹ As Kaegi and J. Devisse separately have argued, reinforced by the estimate of the eminent Maghrib historian Laroui: Kaegi 1984. Devisse 1996; Devisse 1988: 389–91. Devisse 1972: 49, "Qui qu'on en ait souvent prétendu, il semble bien qu'on puisse dire qu'aucun trafic régulier de direction méridienne n'a existé en Afrique occidentale avant le VIII^e siècle ..." Likewise, Laroui 1970: 70. According to Mitchell 2005: 143, there is "only limited support for trans-Saharan connections in pre-Islamic times ..." He does not take notice of the weaknesses in Garrard's 1982 poorly argued thesis for the existence of early trans-Saharan gold trade. I am grateful for the opportunity to have discussed this issue with Dr. Richard Miles of Cambridge University.

¹¹² Liverani 2005: 455–6, 461–2.

¹¹³ Lewis 1951, which never received much critical review even though many cite it. See the much more persuasive monograph by McCormick 2001, which concentrates on trade and communications, not on naval issues.

¹¹⁴ Kaegi 1965.

¹¹⁵ Durliat 1981b: 525, 529; Durliat 1981a: 108–9. No optimal manual exists for understanding the Late Antique archaeology of North Africa, perhaps because the subject is so vast. Finneran 2002: 11–61 surveys some aspects but omits any discussion of possible archaeological evidence for Christianity during and immediately after the initial Muslim expeditions.

¹¹⁶ Extreme but articulate arguments: Sahlī 1965 and reprints.

¹¹⁷ Novick 1988; Noiriel 2005: 115–210, 389–400.

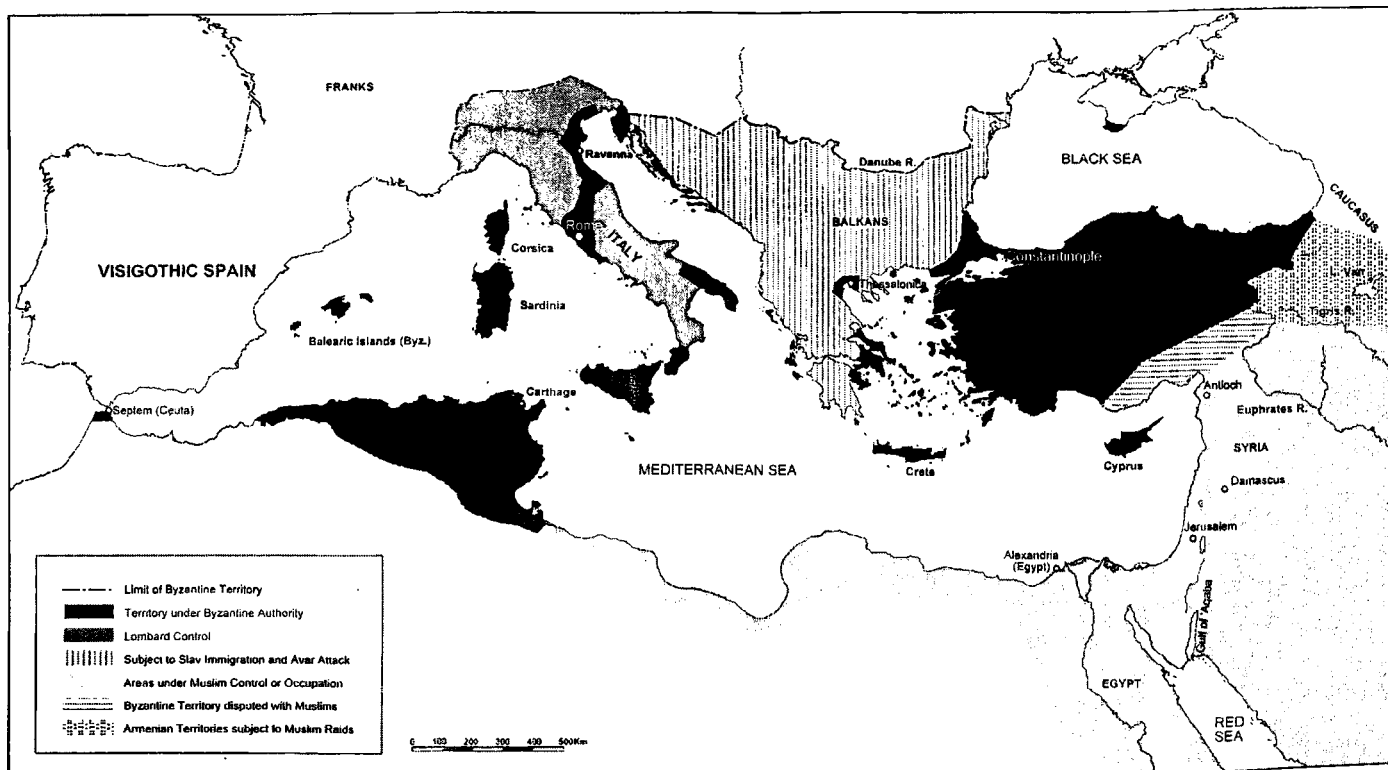
when other much more serious historiographical issues beset the historian and the reader today. In the end, it is nevertheless desirable to understand the framing of historiographical assumptions and structures for the interpretation of the history of North Africa. The reinterpretation of Muslim expansion and Byzantine collapse in North Africa is potentially rewarding, for it has implications for understanding and framing broader Byzantine, Medieval, Early Islamic, and Mediterranean history.

*Fragmented geographical
and logistical realities*

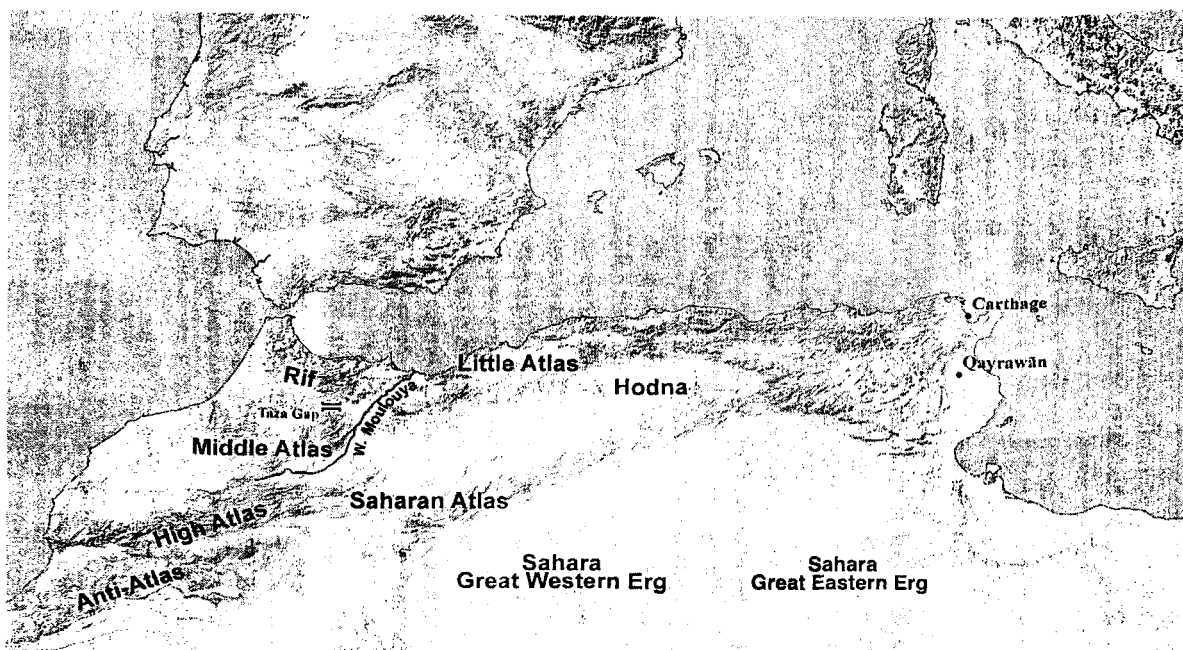
The geographical dimensions of the western section of the seventh-century Byzantine Empire somewhat resembled those of the Carthaginian Empire more than eight hundred years earlier. It was, like Carthage, a maritime empire, and its center in North Africa was Carthage, which was well placed to dominate Mediterranean islands such as the Balearics, Corsica, Sardinia, whose southern shores lie just under 300 kilometers from Carthage, southwesternmost Sicily, which lies about 140 kilometers away from Cape Bon, Tunisia, as well as intersecting critical maritime lanes and ports. But the empire's forces were not well suited to control inland North African transportation and travel or military movements. Local fragmentation had been proceeding for a long time to undermine notions of imperial unity. However, unlike ancient Carthage, Byzantium was not primarily a trading empire but one nevertheless oriented toward and dependent on naval dominance of the Mediterranean in the east as well as in the west, and unlike Carthage, Byzantium maintained a substantial presence in sections of the Italian peninsula. Rome lies about 600 kilometers distant from Carthage.

The empire had dominated all maritime entrances to and egresses from the Mediterranean at the beginning of the seventh century, but by mid-century its territorial reach receded in the wake of Muslim conquests in southwest Asia and Egypt as well as Avaro-Slavic, Visigothic, and Lombard advances respectively in southeastern Europe, Spain, and the Italian peninsula (see Map 2).¹ No end to attenuation was in sight. In retrospect the empire was undergoing some process of entropy that was not evident to all contemporaries. By conquering lightly populated Tripolitania² by 643 the Muslims not only gained more booty, territory, and tribute, but they also created a vast territorial buffer between the Byzantines in Africa and

¹ Geographical aspects of the Byzantine Empire: Koder 1984. ² Christides 2000: 38–9.



Map 2 The Byzantine Empire c. 645, soon after the death of Heraclius



Map 3 Principal geographic features of North Africa
Scale c. 1 : 15,000,000

Egypt, which was extremely rich and populous and which the Muslims had just conquered, and over which they were consolidating their control. That new buffer of Muslim-controlled territory also made it more difficult for Egyptians and others to flee from Muslim control, that is, it became much more difficult for any discontents to flee overland from Egypt to northwest Africa, which the Byzantines normally labeled as simply Africa, or even to take small boats along the Libyan coast. But now Muslims had placed themselves close to the southern edges of the province of Byzacium (Byzacena), interposing themselves near what is now southern Tunisia.

By the seventh century Byzantium was an aging but very ancient bureaucratic empire that had evolved out of Rome's.³ The empire's center of power and communications in Constantinople lies 1,700 kilometers east of Carthage via air, or 2,000 kilometers via sea by way of Sicily, normally three weeks by sea from Carthage, and 285 days' travel (by foot) east of Tingis (Tangier), according to the sixth-century Procopius.⁴ Carthage lay more than 2,000 kilometers west of Alexandria, Egypt, and 1,500 kilometers east of the Straits of Gibraltar.⁵ Imperial limits stretched far beyond the central and western Mediterranean to Armenia and the Taurus Mountains to the east and southeast, and to the shores of the Black Sea and the Danube. The empire had many diverse responsibilities and subject populations and languages. It could not concentrate all of its attention and resources on North Africa given its many other priorities and external pressures. The dimensions of seventh-century Byzantine Africa were significantly more modest, perhaps by a third, than one scholar's estimate of 110,000 square miles of Roman Africa in the second century (see Map 3).⁶ Another specialist estimated the maximum size of Roman Africa as 350,000 square kilometers in the first half of the third century CE. It still covered some 240,000 square kilometers in the age of Emperor Diocletian (284–305).⁷ The handlist of offices and ranks entitled the *Notitia Dignitatum* claimed that c. 400 Late Roman military forces counted 11,000 cavalry and 14,500 infantry, but this number seems suspiciously high.⁸

The western limits of Byzantine occupation and control in the continent of Africa are uncertain and controversial, except for the ports of Septem (Ceuta) and Tingis (Tangier) in what is now the northern tip of

³ Louth 2005.

⁴ Procopius, *Wars* 3.1.9. Insecure conditions made it improbable that anyone would attempt or succeed in walking such a distance.

⁵ Drinkwater 2004: xv–xvi; Sotinel 2004: 65–71; Modéran 2003a: 617 n. 41.

⁶ Estimate for second century: Cherry 1998: 53.

⁷ Courtois 1955: 105. ⁸ Courtois 1955: 81.

Morocco.⁹ The Byzantines did extend their authority west at least briefly into the former late Roman province of Mauretania I Caesariensis, which they claimed at least formally on their list of administrative jurisdictions.¹⁰ Three Prefectures had responsibility for different provinces of North Africa. For Byzantium, as for the earlier Romans, the area around Tingis or Tangier, which the Byzantines called Mauretania II Tingitana or Mauretania Tingitana, was considered administratively attached to its possessions in Spain (essentially limited to the Balearic Islands by the middle of the seventh century) in the old Prefecture of Gaul¹¹ rather than to the provinces to the east, Mauretania I, Numidia,¹² Zeugitana/Africa Proconsularis, Byzacena, and Tripolitania, which they assigned to the Prefecture of Africa. Sardinia and Corsica were administered with Africa. The Prefecture of Oriens was responsible for Egypt, under which fell two other eastern North African provinces in the region that is sometimes called Cyrenaica: Libya Superior (Cyrene, Ptolemais, Apollonia, Barqa (Barca, Barka) or al-Marj, Tokra or Teucheira) and Libya Inferior, which included Derna.¹³ That was an old Late Roman and Byzantine administrative structural format that would soon fade and undergo transformation in the areas that remained under Byzantine control. The terminology for the provinces had reached a venerable age by the middle of the seventh century.¹⁴ Back in the sixth century the historian Procopius inserted reference to events in Mauretania II Tingitana at Septem into his narrative of events further east, in what became the Prefecture of Africa, but administratively the regions remained separated.¹⁵

Economic separation of Mauretania II Tingitana from the African provinces that lie to the east of it paralleled administrative separation in Late Antiquity. Mauretania II Tingitana traded more extensively with nearby Spain¹⁶ while the provinces of the Prefecture of Africa traded more with Italy, Sicily, and Sardinia. Travel from Mauretania II Tingitana to the provinces of the Prefecture of Africa appears to have been more common by sea than by land, given impediments of terrain, climate, and

⁹ Isidore of Seville (Barney *et al.*): 14.5.12; Gosalbes Cravioto 1981; Vallejo Girvés 1993: 49–78, 315–72.

¹⁰ Modéran 2003a: 672–3; Georgius Cyprius, *Le Synkédomos d'Hieroklès et l'opuscule géographique de Georges de Chypre*, ed. E. Honigmann (Brussels: 1939): 54–7.

¹¹ Isidore of Seville (Barney *et al.*): 14.4.29.

¹² Benabbès 2005: 459–64. ¹³ Wilson 2001.

¹⁴ Isidore of Seville (Barney *et al.*): 14.5.3–16.

¹⁵ Procopius, *Wars* 4.5.6; *Buildings* 6.7.14–16. Difficulties of administering these territories as a single unit: Vallejo Girvés 1993, 357–72.

¹⁶ Isidore of Seville (Barney *et al.*): 14.4.29. For reflections: Kulikowski 2004, 71–80.

insecurity. Long-distance overland transportation was slow and difficult, and especially so in rugged and mountainous Numidia between the coast and points in the interior such as its capital Constantine. But low-value goods could and did move inexpensively by camel caravan.¹⁷

The potential range of seventh-century Byzantine–Muslim military operations in North Africa was staggering. For example, Babylon or Fustât (Old Cairo) lies some 2,100 kilometers by air to the east of Carthage, and a far greater distance if following the old Roman coastal road system. From BuNjem, Libya via the Libyan oasis of Ghadâmis to Dimmidi south of the Saharan Atlas in Algeria is more than 1,500 kilometers (almost 1,000 miles), and from the Cyrenaican frontier to el Kahdra (southeast of modern Algerian Tlemcen) and west of Algeria's sub-Saharan Atlas Laghouat is 2,200 kilometers or 1,360 miles. From Icosium (Algiers) to modern Tunis is 900 kilometers (see Map 4).

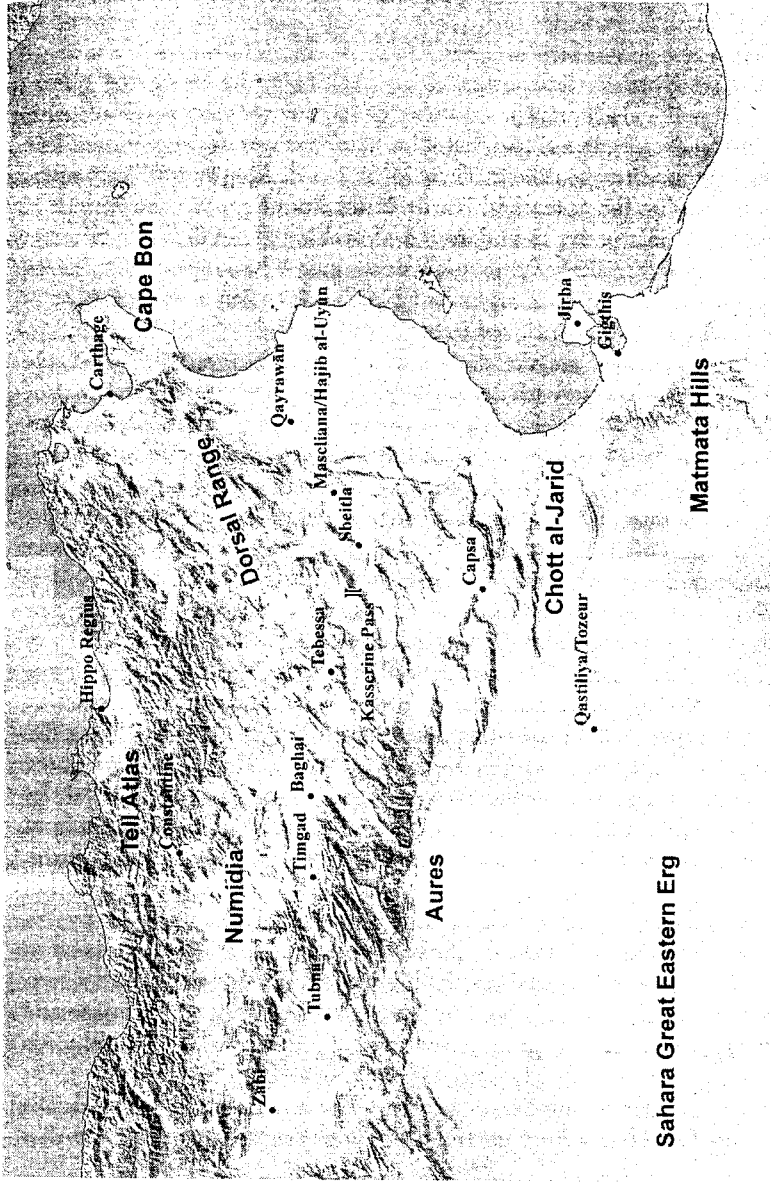
The old Roman road system and its routes persisted into Late Antiquity, but milestones of the kind that proliferated from the first through third centuries were no longer being erected or maintained. Logistical challenges abounded.¹⁸ Everything was not concentrated along the littoral. That has positive aspects. The fifth and early sixth centuries witnessed the flourishing of travel and commerce from the coast inland to nodal centers such as Gafsa (ancient Capsa), Thelepte and then on to Tebessa, and points further west, to which testify the remarkably large churches and ruins scattered at Thelepte and Tebessa. That busy and important internal route between Gafsa and Tebessa offered a tempting target for opportunistic raiders from the southeast. Tebessa was six days' journey from Carthage, and the Aures were between nine and thirteen days' travel from Carthage, while thirty kilometers per day is possible in the Egyptian desert.¹⁹ Troops could move about eleven to twelve kilometers per day, while privileged elites might accomplish twenty-nine to thirty-two kilometers per day.²⁰ The Byzantines had erected many fortifications that remain evident to the eye of the traveler today along the old Roman trunk road between Carthage and Tebessa via Ammaedera (modern Tunisian Haidra). It was essential to secure those communications.

¹⁷ Feissel 2002; Decker 2009: 256–7.

¹⁸ Broader logistical issues: Kaegi 1993, 1995; Haldon 1997b, 2006a.

¹⁹ Procopius, *Wars* 4.21.19, and 3.8.5, 4.13.22 respectively. Feissel 2002: 389, 397. Privileged individuals, with imperial passes, in Late Antiquity might travel five miles per hour or thirty-two miles per day (between twenty-four and thirty-five miles daily): Matthews 2006: 50. Thirty kilometers per day in the Egyptian desert: Adams 2007: 44–6.

²⁰ Pryor 2006: 9; Haldon 2006a: 141.



Map 4 Byzantine North Africa with selected key features
 Scale c. 1 : 5,000,000

DIVERSITY OF REGIONS: AN OVERVIEW
OF MICRO-REGIONS

Byzantine North Africa possessed, in addition to its variegated historical and political geography, a number of fragmented micro-regions, with diverse landscapes and climates, not monotonously uniform or monolithic ones. The conditions in these affected decision-making and military operations. Muslim forces reached North Africa from Egypt in the 640s. It is accordingly instructive to understand something of the differing climatic conditions that military forces might encounter in moving westward from Egypt into the respective regions of North Africa, or in returning eastward from having campaigned in northwest Africa.

Water and wind are the dominant and precious variables. Probably the climate in the seventh century CE approximately resembled that of today, even though the forest cover today is much reduced. Only a narrow coastal fringe of North Africa has a gentle Mediterranean climate, with the highest annual rainfall and humidity and relatively mild autumn and winter weather.²¹ Not far from the temperate coastal fringe or crust in the north often lie mountains and hilly country with harsh extremes of climate, including snow and mudslides that can last into April, followed by searing summer heat. The highest rainfall lies in the extreme west near Morocco's Mediterranean coast and on the coastal Tell from Algiers to Bizerte in Tunisia. Much of the broader North African climate experiences hot and dry summers, with irregular and occasionally violent precipitations. A dominant feature of North Africa is several successive horizontal bands or chains or belts of plains and depressions separated by chains of mountains running east-west.²² Thus the coastal Tell Atlas is separated by a horizontal band or chain of plains and depressions from another horizontal band of mountains that form the Saharan Atlas chain. Land passage from east to west is often best accomplished via the chain of imperfectly linked interior plains, basins, and depressions and not by trying to follow the coastline too closely. However coastal travel from east to west is relatively easy, if the traveler has water and food, until one encounters the irregular coastline and rougher terrain of northwest Tunisia and extreme northeastern Algeria. After that point westward land travel often becomes easiest not always along the coast, but often through the interior plains, again only if supplies of water and food and fodder are assured. The Rif and Tell Atlas form a northern fringe or crust in North Africa that

²¹ Isnard 1971: 7-43. ²² Racher 1970: 13-20.

often impedes penetration from the Mediterranean coast into the interior. In those regions linkages between coast and interior can be difficult. The easiest North African coastline for access to the interior, whether by landing from ships or by following the coastal route, is that of central and southern Tunisia.

Military forces coming westward along the mostly flat Mediterranean coastal route from Egypt's Nile Delta and Alexandria pass through Egypt's western desert, which contains terrain of flies, vipers, scorpions, sand, dark pebbles, and occasional rock formations, escarpments, wādīs, undulations, salt marshes and depressions. Inland lie some rocky hills and low ridges that reach up to 1,127 meters above sea level. The western desert is no insuperable barrier. In late winter and early spring this so-called desert supports green shoots of some vegetation that can feed camels, goats, and even sheep. It is good terrain for camels, a viable region that can serve as an assembly point, a springboard, a listening post for the latest news, and a proving ground for military expeditions of limited but effective strength against regions still further west in North Africa whether in the interior or along the Mediterranean coast. Commanders in the western desert can consider options before assuming the risks and costs of a major expeditionary undertaking westward. Summer days are hot but nights are usually cold. Winter there can bring extremely cold temperatures and some rain. Except for a somewhat narrow (thirty-eight miles) strip of land separating the Mediterranean from the salt marshes and sand dunes of the Qattara Depression that might be vulnerable to interdiction, no significant land barriers or natural defensive positions exist between the Nile Delta and the 600-foot (180-meter) Halfaya Pass escarpment. Finally, after crossing this pass, travelers as well as military forces from Egypt can reach the somewhat elevated terrain of Cyrenaica. It is the first of thirteen North African micro-regions of varying relevance for this study. It is a complex, fragile, and fragmented one. Undulations increase, ridges run east to west and the northern faces of the ridges tend to be steeper. Wādīs drop to the sea. Some sections of the coastal route have rocky subsoil. The distance between Suez on Egypt's Mediterranean coast and Cyrenaica's tableland is about 500 miles (804.7 kilometers), or twenty days' journey, according to Procopius in the sixth century.²³

The coast of modern Libya stretches almost 1,800 kilometers along the Mediterranean. Cyrenaica, with a core of approximately 270 kilometers in

²³ Procopius, *Buildings* 6.2.3.

a larger 400 kilometers of vital coastline and up to 150 kilometers in depth, is a tableland, in a series of rocky escarpments, indented with seasonal wādīs and ravines and terraces, which rise to almost 1,000 meters.²⁴ Hard, flat desert floor forms the surface of part of the Cyrenaican coastal road. From north to south the lower of two plateaus has an altitude of 250–300 meters while the higher one has average altitude of 600 meters. Rainfall is irregular during the year but varies considerably from year to year. In some regions it can exceed an annual maximum of 500 millimeters but most regions receive between 200 and 500 millimeters annually. Annual rainfall on the lower plateau rapidly recedes away from the coast with an isohyet of 200 to below 100 millimeters. for pre-desert conditions. It falls between November and February. Cool, damp northeast winds from the Mediterranean deposit their moisture here. Sandstorms occur in the spring and autumn. The population of Cyrenaica was heavily concentrated on a narrow fertile coastal strip not wider than fifty kilometers which supported some agriculture and livestock herding. The coastal strip enjoys a Mediterranean climate of warm summers and mild winters but its shore, with only small ports, can be dangerous and inhospitable. Parts of the Cyrenaican hard gravel coastal strip are as narrow as a mile (1.609 km) as it progressively narrows eastwards from the Syrtic Gulf to a point fifteen kilometers east of the ruins of ancient and Late Antique Ptolemais. The hilly countryside of the Jabal al-Akhdar is a high plateau with stands of olive trees, juniper, cypress, and pine. Annual rainfall ranges from 400 to 600 millimeters. Water supplies are and were very limited and far apart in the interior beyond the coast. Behind the elevated Jabal al-Akhdar a barren plain stretches and gives way to Sahara, where rare oases enable interior communication between the Nile Valley and the Syrtic Gulf without using the coastal road. So it is possible for those with adequate supplies of water, fodder, provisions, and accurate information to outflank coastal communications.²⁵ Maritime trade was a focus of the regional urban economy.

A second micro-region extends beyond the confines of modern Libya. It is the Sahil or coast of Tripolitanian Libya and southern Tunisia. It is an intermediate or pre-desert or subdesert or preSahara zone with four to five months of summer, while the remaining months may have irregular rainfall.²⁶ Part of it is an even narrower, marginally viable Mediterranean

²⁴ D. Johnson 1973; Horden and Purcell 2000: 65–74; Kraeling 1962: 1–3.

²⁵ Rebuffat 1970: 4–6; Johnson 1973: 152–5.

²⁶ Despois and Raynal 1967: 217–34.

coastal strip than Cyrenaica. The subdesert steppe stretches 900 kilometers (560 miles) from Cyrenaica to Leptis Magna in Tripolitania with 400 millimeters or less of annual rainfall, often 200 millimeters or less. It extends more than 400 kilometers west and north from Leptis Magna, Libya to Gabes or Tacapae, southern Tunisia. Rainfall along the Tripolitanian coastal strip or *sahil* (coast, shore) is erratic. Conditions for agriculture and pasturage are fragile. Along the eastern section of the Tripolitanian coast there is very modest predesert scrub ground cover with indented valleys. Some salt marshes dot coastal areas in the Syrtic Gulf. Rainfall diminishes from east to west in the countryside behind Tripoli and does not reach 400 millimeters annually. The Djeffera or littoral in the west receives less than 100 millimeters of annual rainfall. Sea breezes penetrate only a few kilometers from the coast. In the adjacent predesert interior rainfall oscillates between 25 and 150 millimeters per year; 80 percent of rainfall occurs between December and March. From the end of March the rains cease, and pasture rapidly dries up. Summer temperatures are stable but very hot from May to October. The heat causes rapid evaporation. But the remaining seven months can experience rapid and violent changes of weather. The sirocco or khamsin or ghibli is frequent in spring and summer and may last a week or two or even more; it gives the air a yellowish tint and is filled with fine grains of sand that penetrate almost everything. After Tripoli and Sabratha the easily traversed coastal road to the west follows the southern coastline of modern Tunisia northward. This is a rare part of the sandy Sahil or coast that stretches along the coast north where semi-desert or desert virtually touches the Mediterranean shore.²⁷ Coastal waters are notoriously shallow and can be hazardous for navigation. Coastal navigation between North Africa and Egypt was always difficult because of dangerous shoals and other conditions.²⁸ Prevailing winds and currents favored east-west movement from the Levant and the Aegean to the far western Mediterranean via Sicily rather than by a North African coastal route.²⁹

Behind the Djeffera or littoral lies the escarpment or range of hills and highlands of the Jabal Nafusah, which stretch in the form of a crescent some 200 kilometers north as far as Gabes in Tunisia.³⁰ The coastal plain is approximately 129 meters at its widest between Nalut, Libya and the

²⁷ Despois 1955: 9–55; soil conditions, 57–70.

²⁸ N. Duval 2000: 393 observation in his review of Christides 2000; Semple 1932: 146–7, 149; Pryor 1988: 21; Fulford 1989: 171.

²⁹ Mitchell 2005: 56. ³⁰ Despois 1935.

Mediterranean. It slightly rises from west to east. Heights reach over 700 meters. Its rainfall, which is irregular, varies between 150 and 250 millimeters per year. Some agriculture and livestock pasturing exist in the valleys and on terraced hillsides. The chain terminates in the north in the Tunisian Matmata hills at Jabal Melab. The northwestern end of the coastal plain steadily narrows between the Matmata hills, which mostly run north to south, and the Mediterranean. Behind the Jabal Nafusah in turn lies the arid country known as the Dahar or backbone, which is a rigid plateau where drainage, when there is any precipitation, descends toward the Sahara. The Jabal Nafusah and the narrow band of the Dahar can serve as a refuge and can mask movements in the interior. Behind the Dahar lies the inhospitable rocky and lifeless plateau of the Hammada el Hamrah with distinctive reddish or rose sandy soil. Infrequent oases exist in the interior, such as the Fazzān oasis (the hyperarid region has annual rainfall of less than 20 millimeters) and the oasis of Ghadāmis.³¹ The latter is situated between the Hammada el Hamrah and the sand dune desert of the Grand Erg Oriental. After the Jabal Nafusah and the narrow band of the Dahar lie predesertic and desert stretches with small sand dunes sometimes relieved by wells and oases, followed further west with the large and virtually impassable sand desert of the Grand Erg Oriental. The northern tip of the Dahar merges or transforms into land with some light brush cover and shallow salt marshes or Chotts. These Chotts are dry salt lakes most of the year but may fill with water during the winter. The most eastern Chott is the vast Chott al Jarīd and its eastern extension known as the Chott al Fejaj. The Chott al Jarīd is a barrier but not an insuperable one for military forces. Experienced guides can find safe passages for traversing the salt marshes when the Chott is not overflowing with water. Slightly to the northwest of the Chott al Jarīd is another smaller salt marsh called the Chott el Gharsa. These Chotts tend to limit most movements along limited strips of dry land that can be vulnerable to interdiction. One needs to bring water, food, and fodder; the local terrain of the salt lakes will not supply sustenance. Unrelenting and shimmering summer heat intensifies discomfort. Oases such as Nafta are rare and valued. South of and parallel to the Chott al Fejaj is a low ridge running east and west known as the Jabal Tebaga. It continues northward as a low watershed separating the Chotts from the coastal strip. This watershed is sometimes known as the Gabes Gap or Oued (Wādī) Akarit, which flows northeast between the watershed and the Mediterranean. Between Jabal Tebaga and Jabal Melab runs

³¹ Mattingly *et al.* 2003: 1: 1–94.

a low pass of six and a half kilometers (four miles) length and up to sixteen kilometers (ten miles) in width, although at one point it narrows to three and a half miles, known as the Tebaga Gap. It stretches from the Dahar to the coastal plain approximately twenty-four kilometers from Gabes (Tacapae). A military force that enters the Dahar from the coastal plain in the south could outflank and then again reach the Mediterranean coast through this pass.

Tunisia possesses 1,300 kilometers of coastline. Tunisia's low Mediterranean coast enjoys three large gulfs that accentuate its access: Tunis, Hammamet, and Gabes. The relatively low physical relief of coastal Tunisia has made it more accessible to traders as well as invaders. This section of North African Mediterranean coastline is among the most gentle with respect to terrain and most accessible for communication and commerce between inhabitants and outsiders. With the exception of some peaks the altitude of its high plains (sometimes called steppe) is 900 to 300 meters, while lower plains or steppe reach 200 meters. Tell climate tends to accompany terrain with firmer soils that have more color. But steppe plains have paler colors due to the relative absence of humus from vegetation. The barer countryside has minimal vegetation and minimal streams. Low hills tend to be grooved with many small channels for runoff when it occurs.

A line between Graiba and Gabes approximately marks the beginning of Tunisian Saharan flora. It is a region of marginality and uncertainty, where variable weather affects agriculture and raising of livestock. It is exposed to influences from the Mediterranean as well as from the desert. Climatic conditions vary sharply from year to year, making agriculture and livestock raising full of risk. Harvests are unpredictable. Drought is the greatest threat. Winds can be severe, especially the hot winds (sometimes called sirocco or khamsin) that average seventy days annually. The Mediterranean moderates the coastal climate in a narrow band of 15–20 kilometers in depth even in the summer. It diminishes the severity of temperature in summer and winter. The island of Jirba (Djerba), for example, enjoys more temperate weather than the nearby land port of Gabes. Qayrawān's location away from the coast results in many more days of summer heat at 40 °C than coastal Sousse (Hadrumentum). Humidity and precipitation is higher near the coast. But evaporation, especially only a short distance from the littoral, can have severe consequences for vegetation, animals, and humans. It is imperative to plan for adequate water supplies, fodder, and food for animals and humans to permit sustainable military operations. Local conditions do not favor logistics for large

armies. It can be difficult for armies to live off the land. Light brush supported limited population between Tripoli and Tacapae (Gabes) again on a coastal strip or sahil, which is wider than in Cyrenaica and Tripolitania. The climate does not support natural trees, except the drought-resistant varieties such as the jujube and acacia. Tacapae or Gabes has an oasis culture with palms. The local terrain is mostly sandy and dry; very little water exists otherwise. Again, conditions for agriculture and pasturage are fragile. Small ravines indent the countryside. Drainage runs generally, where extant, from west to east. There are various wādīs with infrequent flowing water. Goats and camels and some sheep can graze on scrub grass. The low-level slightly undulating plain does not impede movement. At Mareth the Zigzagaou gully and wādī cut an indentation where it is possible to attempt to establish a linear defense, for here it is about thirty-five and a half kilometers from the Matmata Hills to the Mediterranean shore. Although a choke point, it can be flanked.

Another strategic choke point for coastal travel via land or sea is the mostly level island of Jirba (Djerba, 522 square kilometers); it is virtually attached to the mainland and therefore breaks up the coastline and provides some shelter.³² Opposite it are small inlets and ports. Part of the nearby eroded and semi-arid Matmata hills can support primarily goats and brush, but there is some agriculture. Low rocky hills with scrub lie not far from the coastal road. The hills provide dominant heights for observing coastal traffic. Far into the very arid interior, bedouin utilized routes with scattered wells that permitted circumventing the coastal roads. Some herding exists. There are some intensively cultivated fertile oases for date palms and intensive vegetable cultivation. This region is not suitable for raising much grain or other cereals. Routes to Gafsa (Capsa) from the port of Gabes pass through arid country with limited desert grass and brush, acacia trees, and saltbush. South of Gafsa in the interior the countryside is very arid and devoid of vegetation. Significant oases and sheltered valleys support limited agriculture. The region is very hot and dusty in the summer and not conducive to supporting large armies, their mounts, and pack animals.

A third North African micro-region is Central Tunisia, which lies north of Gabes and the Oued (Wādī) Akarit. It possesses generally poor soils with undulating steppes, with some esparto grass and some thorn trees, especially jujube trees. Only a slow incline slopes westwards from the coast. So passage of ascent is normally without difficulty up to the

³² Drine, *Fentress*, and Holod 2009.

plateaus of Haidra (ancient Ammaedera) and Tebessa. Visibility is rather good, however gullies and indentations in the landscape can hide small batches of soldiers or raiders. Proximity to the Mediterranean increases the humidity and improves conditions for agriculture. Water supply improves as one moves from south to north. In much of central Tunisia livestock pasturage is possible for part of the year. However, drought is frequent. Rainfall varies annually between 200 and 400 millimeters. Agriculture is possible in the interior near Sbeitla, where there are streams, as at Haidra in the northwest. Intensive olive cultivation in the eastern portion prevails where there is adequate rainfall, with better results further north. Most rain falls between December and March, but autumnal rains can turn the previously parched and brown countryside green by November. There is marginal cultivation of cereals. Fish and shellfish abound near the Mediterranean littoral, especially between the Kerkenna Islands and the island of Jirba.

The low-lying (not more than three meters above sea level) and very militarily vulnerable and very sandy Kerkenna Islands (approximately 180 square kilometers) supported only a modest population, although their dimensions may have been larger at the end of Antiquity; there appears to have been some subsequent sinking of land into the sea combined with a rising sea level. Shortages of water limited population and agriculture. Temperatures vary between 15 °C and 48 °C.

The Dorsal Mountains separate central Tunisia from the fourth micro-region, northern Tunisia,³³ and stretch northeast to southwest for 200 miles before fading out near Feriana (anc. Thelepte). To the west a string of hills demarcate central Tunisia from Algeria and, in Antiquity, from Numidia. The coastal climate of central Tunisia is moderate Mediterranean. Some frost and even light snow can fall in the extreme northwest near the Algerian frontier in winter. The greatest rainfall is close to the modern Algerian frontier, with rainfall decreasing as one moves south. Rainfall can begin in September. Winters can be cold and very damp. There is fertile farmland appropriate for cereals and for cultivation of the olive and vineyards as well as for pasturage. Mountain elevations range from less than 300 meters to slightly more than 1,000 meters. These are part of a chain that extends to the Rif in modern Morocco. Only limited forest tree cover remains. In the Tunisian interior,³⁴ the Dorsal is cut by three depressions, among which the most important is the narrow and vital Kasserine Pass, at approximately 610 meters above sea level, which, although possessing a

³³ Peyras 1991: 15–21. ³⁴ Despois and Raynal 1967: 235–54.

width of only a mile or as little as 900 meters at its narrowest point, opens the way westward from central Tunisia across the north-south partly wooded Tebessa Mountains into the rolling plains of Numidia (eastern Algerian high plains). The oued or river Haleb runs through the pass. It is dry in summer but full of water in the winter. Flanking it on the south is the Jabal Chambi with an altitude of 5,064 feet (1,543.5 meters) and on the north is Jabal Semmama, at 4,447 feet (1,355.45 meters). Some major oueds originate in the Dorsal hills and then cross the high plains or steppe to penetrate to and dissipate in the lower plains before Qayrawān. An important oued is the Zeroud. Flooding can be rapid and irregular and can last several days. Rainfall lasts longer in the Dorsal region's interior, where 40-50 millimeters of rainfall occur monthly between October and May.

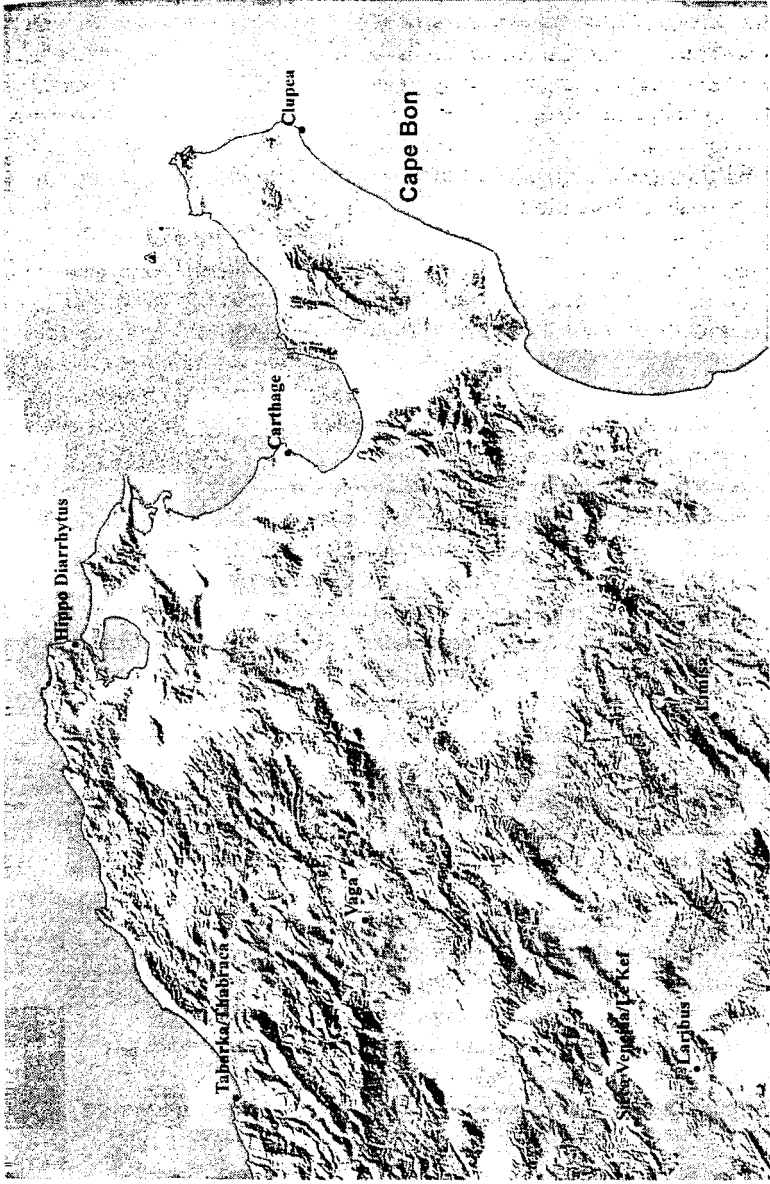
The principal and only perennial stream in all of Tunisia is one in the north, the Mejerda (ancient Bagradas), which originates in northeast Algeria and flows northeast through a fertile valley to the Mediterranean. It is the most important stream in the entire Maghrib (North Africa). But it is not navigable, or suitable only for carrying small loads via water in very small boats. It frequently floods.

The Cape Bon peninsula is narrow, partly stony and hilly, but has an optimal gentle Mediterranean climate with adequate rainfall that enables intensive cultivation of fruits and vegetables. Its width is twenty miles or thirty-two kilometers and its length of protrusion into the Mediterranean is fifty miles or eighty kilometers. The coastline waters contain fish and shellfish.

Sandy soil is common in the coastal areas near Carthage (see Map 5), with the exception of the Byrsa Hill. Northwest of Carthage coastal elevations rise. Strong winds and rain are common from late September into early spring. Temperatures are generally moderate but November through February or March can be cold.

Extreme northwest Tunisia's rocky Mediterranean coastline climbs rapidly from sea level and has small indentations for ports. Coastline travel by land was difficult before the construction of modern roads between Hippo Diarrhytus (Bizerte) and Hippo Regius (Annaba, Buna, Bône). It was often easier to travel westward via inland routes. There is forest cover. Sicily is only 140 and Byzantine-controlled Malta is 288 kilometers distant from Tunisia.

Algeria possesses relatively easy zones of passage in its extreme east and west (in the west, the approaches to the oued Moulouya). Algeria's climate divides into three principal horizontal zones from north to south. These are North Africa's fifth, sixth, and seventh micro-regions. In the



Map 5 Carthage region with Cape Bon
Scale c. 1:1,490,000

north, a variegated zone of 100 kilometers in depth, the so-called Tell Atlas, has a Mediterranean climate with relatively abundant rainfall (more than 400 millimeters annually, perhaps up to 100 centimeters in the northeast, occurring especially between September and December).³⁵ This permits sedentary agriculture. Much of the Algerian Mediterranean coastline is elevated and not easily accessible. The fifth micro-region, the Tell, narrowly lies within a few kilometers of the Mediterranean. The interior, only a short distance away, has a hard continental climate. The Tell Atlas experiences occasionally severe winters with not only dampness but even significant snowfall and mudslides and precipitous hillside erosion. The Petite Kabylie is a partly mountainous region stretching from west of Hippo Regius to Skikhda (anc. Rusicaddir) and includes modern Jijel and the interior, while the much larger and more elevated mountains of the Kabylie or Grande Kabylie include modern Tizi Ouzou, Bouira, and territory even farther west than Bejaia (Bougie), as far west as Boumerdes, which lies just east of modern Algiers. At 2000 meters certain mountains in the Kabylie have snow cover for four to five months. Snow showers and freezing temperatures can occur as late as the beginning of April. Rainfall is irregular. But the very humid terrain of the schists and gneiss of the Kabylie support forests that include pines and even oaks, despite relatively poor quality soils. Summer temperatures average between 21 and 24 °C and in the winter 10 to 12 °C. But winter temperatures can drop to -9 °C at Tiaret, -11 °C at Setif, -13 °C at Batna. There is weakness and irregularity of rains, together with much erosion. But some crops are possible almost every year and livestock can be raised. Much of northeast Algeria, especially territory between the ports of Collo and Hippo Regius (modern Annaba, formerly Bône) and the Numidian provincial capital of Constantine, is fertile, emerald green in the spring-time, and agriculturally productive. The Tell in the west has mountains no higher than 1,900 meters but the summits receive more than 600 millimeters of annual rainfall. The western Tell is more broken up and progressively drier and hotter than the eastern Tell. On the relatively humid coast annual rainfall at Algiers is 647 millimeters while in the vicinity of Caesarea Mauretaniensis (modern Cherchel) it is 635 millimeters and at Tenes 545 millimeters. Rain falls from end of October to the beginning of May. The moderate coastal temperature varies between 13 and 25 °C in August and reaches a low of 12 °C at Caesarea Mauretaniensis.³⁶ The

³⁵ Despois and Raynal 1967: 71-177. ³⁶ Leveau 1984: 217-23.

coastal Atlas chain immediately behind the bowl-like cavity of Cherchel shelters the littoral from the harsher and more arid climate south of the mountain range in the Chelif. The Hodna Mountains and depression or basin with a salt-pan in the center separate the eastern Tell from the western Tell. The Tell, the high plains and their depressions and the Saharan Atlas run parallel to the seacoast.

Behind the coast are semi-arid plains and basins that are eroded and sometimes flooded (the sixth micro-region). Most of the plains and low plateaus and depressions may be classified as semi-arid, with normally less than 500 millimeters of rainfall. Rainfall is highly variable, as is the severity of winter weather. Much of the water from rainfall spreads out and evaporates. Drainage is poor, resulting in salt marshes or *sebkhas*. South of a line between modern Algerian Ain Beida and Setif drainage mostly runs south, except for the Oued Meskiana, northwest of Tebessa. Many springs, some of which tap hot mineral water, exist in the plains. The piedmont further south has more indentations from oueds where such springs become more frequent. There is extensive erosion. Summers are usually torrid. There are plains within the Tell, with some regions capable of producing fine crops (especially in central Algeria, stretching 100 kilometers west of Algiers); others with salt lakes are not. There are areas for growing cereals and raising livestock. This region has some forests, fruit and nut trees, vineyards, and good pasturage. Part of it lies at high altitudes, usually below 1,000 meters, but occasionally rising to 2,300 meters. In the west the plateaus average between 1,100 and 1,300 meters in elevation, but descend to 400 meters in the east. Near modern M'sila in the Hodna depression 400–500 millimeters of annual rainfall and humidity support some forests of juniper and *arborvitae*. In proximity to modern Tilimsân (Tlemcen) in northwest Algeria are mountains with altitudes mostly varying between 1,400 and 1,600 meters although one peak is 1,843 meters in altitude. The nearby plateaus lie at 900–1,300 meters altitude. Part of the Tell's Mediterranean coast is rocky schist and gneiss and irregular with rough and high terrain making it difficult or impossible for travelers to follow a route that strictly hugs the seashore. The coast's concave and convex indentations accompany often steep elevations that frequently discourage contact between sea and land. Much of the coastline is difficult of access. Further south, folds and contortions of calcaceous rock form the mountains. Precipitation at the minimal 400 millimeter isohyet marks the limits of the Tell and the beginning of predesert plains.

In much of Algeria 200 millimeters of annual rainfall is the minimum to prevent desert-like aridity. Below the Tell Atlas lie high plains at an

altitude of an average of 800 to 1,200 meters.¹⁷ In southern Numidia the high plains are treeless, but there can be dense brush. But it is mostly pasture of grass and small bushes, much of it well suited for sheep or goats. Rains and snow can transform the plains into flower-studded shimmering emerald green in the springtime, but rainfall is extremely variable. The calcaceous Batna and Hodna Mounains connect the Aures with the coastal Tell. The Batna Mountains can exceed 2,000 meters in altitude and are partly covered with trees such as pines, arborvitae, oaks, and cedars. It is easy to pass through three ranges – the Belezma, the Ziban, and the largely eroded Nementcha, which connect the Aures with the Hodna, Saharan Atlas, and Tebessa. The high plains of the west extend 500 kilometers from the Hodna Depression, where the altitude ranges between 600 and 800 meters, to the wādī Moulouya. But it is essential to understand that military forces could travel east to west from Gafsa-Sbeitla-Kasserine to Tebessa or Haidra and Tebessa to Timgad, Tahūda to Zana to Setif through the Hodna depression and Auzia and then connecting with high plains in western Algeria, for example via the oued Chelif between the Dahra (“backbone,” similar usage in Libya) hills north of the Ouarsenis Massif to reach ultimately the oued or river Moulouya and eventually the Taza Gap in Morocco. From there land communications again veer away from the Mediterranean and its potential naval interdiction point westward to reach the extreme northwest tip of North Africa at Septem and Tingis (respectively modern Ceuta and Tangier). An alternative east–west route would run from Zabi (near M’sila) to Ain Touta following a southerly route in the Algerian high plains south of the Ouarsenis Massif, again using part of the oued Chelif. This more southerly route passes through Ain Teucra, the old Roman sites of Columnata and Pomaria near modern Tlemcen and then reaches the Roman site of Numerus Syrorum, crosses the modern Algerian–Moroccan border, and then follows the route across the oued Moulouya and the Taza Gap into Mauretania Tingitana (Mauretania II). It is 360 kilometers or 220 miles between the old Roman post of Numerus Syrorum and the ancient and late Roman Mauretanian site of Volubilis (Arabic Walili).

Conditions in Algeria’s high plains are harsh for agriculture and for animals. March and even April can be cold and windy. Summer windstorms can be extremely hot. Pasturage and water are very limited. The high plains includes the enclosed basin of the Hodna. The high plains in the west have an average depth of 100–180 kilometers, average rainfall

¹⁷ Despois and Raynal 1967: 178–97.

between 250 and 350 millimeters, 4–13 days of snow, and 40–60 days of frost, especially above 900 meters altitude. The beds of dry oueds are filled with tamarisk and oleander. Individual hills will be covered with scrub. Conditions are difficult for agriculture and for raising livestock. The high plains are mostly arid plains with gaps between tufts of vegetation with thin and often poor soils on rock bases. Below it are the Atlas Saharan Mountains, the seventh micro-region, which in the west have a depth of fifty to seventy-five kilometers. The southwestern Saharan Atlas is relatively arid but has some precipitation and even snow in its northern exposures. But its normal aridity contrasts to the relative humidity of the unusual subclimate of the eastern section of the Saharan Atlas, the Eurasian micro-region, with its steep cliffs and long ridges and sections of green cover. There occupants have some good grazing land.

The Aures, with a perimeter of about 300 kilometers, not including the nearby drier Nementcha Mountains to the southeast, has its own subclimate with relatively abundant rainfall and vegetation that distinguish it from the drier plains to the north and the very arid Sahara and eighth micro-region to the south.¹⁸ Precipitation of 100 millimeters (4 inches) is the isohyet at the edge of the Sahara. Between the Aures and the Batna mountains and other parts of the calcaceous Saharan Atlas chain in the east is the distinctive and strategically important but narrow gap and corridor created by the oued (*wādī*) of Biskra and Kantara (Al Qantara). The greenness of vegetation near Kantara or Al Qantara is striking and contrasts with the otherwise severe landscape. The Al Qantara gap creates an opportunity for transhumant migration from the Sahara between the two sections of the Saharan Atlas. At Biskra the annual precipitation is 170 millimeters, and further south it is even less. The Sahara experiences great changes of temperature between day and night. South of the Aures winter daytime temperatures can vary between 10 and 40 °C. It is not uniform in terrain. There is piedmont pediplain and desert south of the Aures, with mountain oueds that cease abruptly a short distance south. It is possible for well-provisioned travelers to outflank by traveling south of the Aures to reach oases near the southern Tunisian Chotts. Soil is often light and sandy except for saline soils near the Chotts and the salt marshes south of Constantine on the road to the Aures. Great sand dunes exist in the east and the west, but slightly irregular surfaces with light dried brush exist in the northern stretches south of the Eurasian (Aures) Mountains. The extreme weather conditions limited military operations because of the

¹⁸ Despois and Raynal 1967: 419–35, 441–69.

imperative for such military forces to carry along their supplies of water and food. Preparations are essential for extreme conditions of heat and chill.

The ninth micro-region is Morocco's Rif and northwest. To the east, just west of the modern Moroccan–Algerian border, the river or oued (*wādī*) Moulouya traverses an arid stretch with average 200 millimeters annual rainfall, part of which is sometimes dry flood plain, between the western plains and mountains and hills of northwestern Algeria and Morocco.³⁹ The Moulouya cuts through 560 kilometers northeastwards from the Atlas systems to the Mediterranean coast. The Mediterranean coastline westward rises high above the sea after the oued Moulouya gap. The Rif Mountain chain,⁴⁰ which is part of the Atlas Tell, and the jagged and soaring coastline discourage following the littoral westward. Rif peaks seldom exceed 2,100 meters, but seaside deep ravines pocket its face. The Rif barrier has snow and heavy rainfall and extensive green cover on the western side, with raw, cold, and stormy winters. Winter weather makes some routes impassable. The Rif impedes land travel and access from the interior to the sea. Instead of using coastal roads, those traveling by land from east to west or vice versa in that region are more likely to take the interior route via the narrow Taza Gap. Parts of what was Mauretania Tingitana experienced sufficient rainfall for sedentary agriculture as well as livestock raising. Northwest Morocco's hills and plains have optimal climate and rainfall (more than 500 millimeters annually, with regularity).⁴¹ Northern Morocco lies only thirteen or fourteen kilometers distant from Spain at the Strait of Gibraltar, but sea currents are strong and treacherous. Tingis or Tangier receives 800 millimeters average rainfall annually, while nearby Tetouan (Late Antique Mauretania Tamuda) receives only 650 millimeters. The interior is mountainous with plateaus of rolling plains and plateaus with some fertile valleys and some areas with poor soil. Altitudes on the inland plateau vary between 540 and 900 meters. January is the coldest, August the hottest month. The coast has a more stable climate than the interior. Remaining micro-regions experienced no garrisoning or operations by Byzantine military forces, so only the briefest mention is included here.

The tenth relevant micro-region is Morocco's Atlantic coastal lowlands, which are relatively open and accessible. Only a narrow corridor separates the Rif from the Middle Atlas range. The Atlantic coast

³⁹ Despois and Raynal 1967: 388–402.

⁴⁰ Despois and Raynal 1967: 359–71.

⁴¹ Despois and Raynal 1967: 298–310.

is traversable along a somewhat narrow stretch of several tens of kilometers in width from Tangier south as far as modern Essaouira (historical Mogador),⁴² but in the interior travel can be difficult to extremely difficult because of the mountains. The estuaries of small rivers provided the best shelter and ports for navigation along the ancient Mauretanian or Moroccan Atlantic coast, in contrast to the occasional natural bowl-shaped harbors along sections of the Mediterranean. The Mediterranean and Atlantic coasts have rain normally from April to May and from October to November. Fog and dampness are normal between November and February on the Atlantic coast although temperatures remain moderate. Aridity progressively increases along the coast, south of modern Casablanca. Below the Mediterranean coastal Rif Mountains there are three overlapping chains of formidable Atlas Mountains in Morocco: the Middle (the eleventh micro-region), High (micro-region twelve), and Anti-Atlas (micro-region thirteen). In the interior, steep and easily defended mountain passes across the chains whether east-west or north-south were extremely challenging even outside of winter conditions. Many routes through the mountains lacked abundant provisions of food, fodder, and water. These important mountainous chains always lay outside of Byzantine control. The formidable topography affected Muslim military operations. Central Morocco is watered but rainfall diminishes from west to east, where badlands occupy part of the countryside.⁴³ Weather is variable: freezing temperatures occur for two or more weeks per winter, while the summer ones average 30 °C. The High Atlas with 720 kilometers in length and up to 64 kilometers in breadth is formed of calcaceous mountains with altitudes from 1,200 meters up to 3,000–3,900 meters. Abundant rainfall in the High Atlas provides the sources for oases in the Sūs and further south. The western and central Middle Atlas do not suffer from drought and have snow cover at high altitudes while the eastern section of the Middle Atlas often has inclement weather and some aridity.⁴⁴ The Anti-Atlas has altitudes up to 2,400 meters. Above the Anti-Atlas lies the agriculturally rich Sūs al-Aqṣā, which extends to the Atlantic coast. Even though part of it is fertile and easily traversable it does not make it onto some lists of desirable North African regions.⁴⁵ South of it and the Anti-Atlas is progressively semiarid and very arid land that lay beyond the experiences and direct or historical knowledge of Byzantines, even though subsequently early Muslim

⁴² Despois and Raynal 1967: 265–97.

⁴³ Despois and Raynal 1967: 280–1, 300, 340–3.

⁴⁴ Despois and Raynal 1967: 372–87.

⁴⁵ Collins 2004: 121.

military expeditions and missionaries successfully extended their probes into it.

The micro-regions underscore the lack of geographical uniformity and the enormous and variable challenges for military and political decision-making and operations.

DEMOGRAPHIC AND ECONOMIC CONDITIONS

The population of Roman North Africa had reached a zenith of perhaps 3,000,000 inhabitants late in the second or in the third century but that was surely reduced by the seventh century.⁴⁶ The economy of seventh-century Byzantine North Africa⁴⁷ still depended heavily on the olive.⁴⁸ The Kasserine region experienced a drop in settlements and agricultural production in the sixth and seventh centuries, probably due to rising insecurity and rising taxation.⁴⁹ The economy was basically healthy even in the remote Aures region of Numidia.⁵⁰ Grain remained another basic crop for African domestic consumption and export. The Byzantines controlled the best cereal-producing regions of North Africa on the eve of the Muslim conquests. Production and export of ceramics remained strong, although seventh-century exports were significantly fewer than those of the fourth century.⁵¹ Livestock husbandry in the form of raising of sheep and goats and horses was common. Purple dye was being manufactured on the island of Jirba (Djerba) at Meninx until not long before the Muslim conquest but production was declining.⁵² Slavery continued. Life was especially hard out in hilly or semiarid countryside. The sea still abundantly furnished fish and shellfish. Hagiographic texts suggest that some marble was still exported while other kinds of rare marble were imported. Such luxurious imports were exceptional. Extensive maritime commerce existed with other regions of the empire for these items as well as imports to North Africa of luxury items such as fine textiles and probably other items that were in short supply in Africa, such as ferrous metals and certain classes

⁴⁶ But Ellis 1985: 30–42; cf. situation in contemporary Italy, where much demographic decline took place: Neil Christie 2006: 57–64.

⁴⁷ Mrabet 1995: 126, 132–3. Bonifay 2004: 484–5 on continuity; Duncan-Jones 2004: 33–8. Wickham 2005: 87–93, 635–44, 708–28.

⁴⁸ Ibn 'Abd al-Hakam (Torrey): 185; Gateau 1948: 46–9. Al-Tijāni, *Rihlat al-Tijāni* 65. Decker 2009: 152–73.

⁴⁹ Hitchner 1992–3: 180. ⁵⁰ P. Morizot 1997: 276–8.

⁵¹ Bonifay 2005: 570; Abadie-Reynal 2005; Ward-Perkins 2005: 106, 121–4, 132.

⁵² Fontana 2000: 113–14; Fentress 2009: 198–200 and Fontana 2009: 208–10, both in Drine, Fentress and Holod 2009.

of timber. North Africa was still a market as well as a source of exports. It is however impossible to quantify production or economic transactions or demography. North Africa had been the wealthiest region of the western half of the empire in the first three centuries CE. Its wealth had been an essential source of military finance before the middle of the fifth century. Even in the seventh century North Africa's wealth remained a valuable source for imperial finance, including military finance.⁵³

The majority of the population of Byzantine North Africa derived their livelihood from agriculture, but their ranks in the towns counted merchants, fishermen, sailors, and small craftsmen and potters as well. A Latin-speaking elite⁵⁴ of Roman landowners (Romano-Africans)⁵⁵ persisted who held distinctive views and cherished a long-developed identification with and commitment to Roman cultural ideals, namely, Romanness or *Romanitas*.⁵⁶

North Africa's economy appears to have been relatively positive at the beginning of the seventh century, especially in comparison with the stressful conditions in many other regions of the empire.⁵⁷ Sources give only impressionistic and non-quantifiable information. The *Doctrina Jacobi* refers to ships that were carrying expensive silks from Constantinople and that were sailing near the southern Tunisian port of Thena (south of modern Sfax) in the early 630s. A North African saint's life in Greek, of Kyprianos, Bishop of Thena, refers probably in the late sixth or early seventh century to another case of contact between Thena and Thessalonica and Constantinople, one that involved the diversion of expensive Proconnesian marble from Constantinople from one African patron to another. Churches were still being embellished in Africa with lavish, indeed high-quality building materials on the eve of the Muslim conquest.⁵⁸ Maritime ties between Africa and Thessalonica and Constantinople remained strong in the final century of Byzantine Africa.⁵⁹ News of events and benchmarks of beauty and style and taste were still circulated to Africa from

⁵³ Lee 2007: 118.

⁵⁴ Haldon and Conrad 2004. Especially relevant are Averil Cameron 2004 and Haldon 2004.

⁵⁵ Concept of Conant 2004: 22.

⁵⁶ Durliat 1981b: 525, 529. On the identity and transformation and persistence of the North African elite: Conant 2004, esp. "Conceptualizing Romanness," pp. 4–12, and conclusions on pp. 437–49.

⁵⁷ Loseby 2005: 608–16, 623, 632–7 persuasively explains the continuation of the interdependence of the Mediterranean and its exchange networks until the end of the seventh century. Also: Benabbes 2004: 134; Leone and Mattingly 2004: 136, 155–6.

⁵⁸ Bakirtzis 2000. The primary source: Lemerle 1979, 1981.

⁵⁹ Bonifay 2005: 570.

Constantinople. Much of Byzantine North Africa was oriented toward the Mediterranean, but there were overland trading routes and networks in the interior, especially in Numidia, for which the Mediterranean was remote and not visibly important for the wellbeing of many farmers, travelers, shepherds, and merchants.

ETHNIC AND CULTURAL AFFINITY AND CONFLICT

Diverse ethnicities, languages, cultures, and religious communities existed within Zeugitana (*Africa Proconsularis*) and Numidia although the Byzantine authorities did not look with favor on diversity. They regarded diversity as fractious, harmful to the cohesion of the empire and likely in the case of religious diversity to bring down divine wrath to the injury of the empire. With respect to ethnic divisions one cannot make any reasonable estimate of the Latin versus Greek versus assimilated autochthonous versus non-assimilated autochthonous populations and Jews on the eve of the Muslim Conquest in North Africa.

Linguistic and cultural gaps separated the Latin Romanized African population (Romano-Africans) from the Byzantine authorities and both of them in turn from the autochthonous non-Romanized populations. The gaps are difficult to assess but they impeded efforts to solidify resistance to the Muslims.⁶⁰ The late fifth-century enemies of Byzantine presence in the west (especially in Gaul and Italy)⁶¹ had referred to Byzantine Romans as "Greeks" or "Greeklings" in order to emphasize their otherness. That pattern of polemic persisted in Ostrogothic efforts to stir up local resistance to the sixth-century Byzantine reconquest in the Italian peninsula. Probably echoes of those polemics against the Greekness of the Byzantine occupation existed in North Africa but they are not well attested. Greek and Armenian participation gave the Byzantine administration and control of North Africa unusual problems of identity.⁶² However the survival of place names such as Constantine in Numidia attest to an attachment that developed into a Roman-Christian-Byzantine identity of some kind in certain localities. The nature and depth of the ties are difficult to measure. Inhabitants of Constantine (Constantina), the capital of Numidia, might well have had some sentimental affinities for the distant imperial capital of Constantinople even though few had ever seen it, and in turn,

⁶⁰ Broad review of many linguistic and cultural problems: C. Rapp 2004b: 1221–80.

⁶¹ Kaegi 1968: 46–7, 55–6; also, Thompson 1982: 100–9, in the chapter entitled "The Byzantine conquest of Italy: public opinion"; Kaegi 1995.

⁶² On issues and kinds of identity: Cooper 2005: 64–5.

the imperial court and residents of Constantinople might have held at least some wisps of solidarity with the gorge-rimmed city of Constantine. But the silent literary and epigraphic records do not permit conclusions.

Difficult to assess is the degree to which different regions and provinces within Byzantine Africa cooperated and provided mutual support. Distances were large and different regions sometimes had different interests. It is erroneous to assume that every section of Byzantine North Africa acted in unison with others. Poor communications reinforced regional perspectives and municipal pride and rivalries as well as differing personal ambitions and agricultural and pastoral interests to complicate development of unified positions and cooperation on numerous issues, including matters of mutual defense and fiscal expenditures. It is misleading to look at a map of Byzantine authority in North Africa and then assume that policies and regulations were implemented smoothly in a uniform manner everywhere. Realities were far different. It was awkward to try to induce all diverse sectors and regions to cooperate and to act in unison. That fragmented and sometimes cumbersome infrastructure of Byzantine power persisted on the eve of and during the lengthy process of the Muslim conquest. It was not easy to have Byzantine commands that originated in Carthage or Constantinople executed out in regions that were distant from Carthage and the Mediterranean coast. Perspectives were different there and moved at a local tempo that local considerations and conditions determined. Cohesion was desirable but loose and slow implementation and centrifugal and irregular responses and discordant practice were often the realities.⁶³

The Romans, Late Romans, and Byzantines had no comprehensive vision of a North Africa or Maghrib.⁶⁴ Ancient geographers conceived of continents of which Africa was one ("the third part of the world").⁶⁵ The term Mediterranean may only have appeared in the seventh century.⁶⁶

It would be the Muslims who would first create conditions for the ultimate emergence of a comprehensive notion of North Africa and a Maghrib, although it would remain imperfect even under Islam.⁶⁷ The Byzantines' fragmented conception of North Africa impeded their ability to develop viable conceptions for the defense and prosperity and survival

⁶³ Longer term disunity of North Africa: Gsell 1972: 1: 2–29.

⁶⁴ Isidore of Seville (Barney *et al.*): 14.1.1, 14.5.3–17.

⁶⁵ Cf. Isidore of Seville (Barney *et al.*): 14.2.1.

⁶⁶ Isidore of Seville (Barney *et al.*): 13.16.1. Van Dam 2007: 50–1.

⁶⁷ Laroui 1970: 13–7 justifiably raised the issue of the idea of the Maghrib, but such a concept was unknown to the Byzantines or Romans.

of their imperial possessions and interests in North Africa. Administrative separation discouraged development of any coherent military strategy that included both Mauretania II Tingitana and the provinces of the Prefecture of Africa. There was an Africa viewed from the Mediterranean and from Carthage and Constantinople, not from Qayrawān or the Numidian capital of Constantine or from still more remote Mascula (modern Algerian Khenchela) in the Aures Mountains or Tebessa.

The view from Carthage, however impressive, can provide an unrealistic and deceptive perspective and understanding of the viewer's ability to control events in the wider Maghrib.⁶⁸ Centers of actual political and military power were dispersed. The often breezy and blissfully temperate climate on the Byrsa Hill at Carthage can give misleading impressions about harsher extremes of weather and military and political conditions that exist in other parts of North Africa, such as the interior of Byzacena and Numidia, let alone in territories that lie further west. It is temptingly easy to sit in North Africa, on the coast at Carthage or nearby heights, with the waves splashing and the branches of the trees swaying in the breezes against a backdrop of lush vegetation, and think that one can go it alone, that one can be self-reliant. Life can seem easy. Europe and Asia and their problems can seem to be far away. One can temporarily forget possible perils from the sea or from those who experience the harsher extremes of climate in the North African interior or those who may approach from the east or from the desert. That was part of the local problem for elites, clerics, soldiers, and merchants and craftsmen in seventh-century coastal North Africa. Soon it became apparent that North Africa could not escape broader trends and broader military realities that prevailed in southwest Asia and Egypt. Control of the Byrsa Hill in Carthage did not assure the control of North Africa. Perspectives on North African problems and realities are quite different from the eyrie of "Le Rocher" and the summits of the steep and deep slender sliver of gray gorge cut by the Rhumel in Constantinople, Numidia (Algeria) and still different on the remote rolling plains of southern Numidia that the dark Aures Mountains delimit and overshadow.

⁶⁸ However objectionable because of its colonialist assumptions, there is some validity to Stephane Gsell's observation that North Africa lacks a true (political) center: Gsell 1972: 1: 25-9.

CHAPTER 4

Christian contexts in seventh-century North Africa

PIOUS HOPES AND ANXIETIES

The year 636 CE is famous for witnessing the fateful battle of the Yarmūk and its carnage that took place between Byzantines and Muslims in Syria on the edge of the Golan Heights. It resulted in a rapid and decisive Byzantine withdrawal from Syria. Sometime in the same decisive year 636, which also included the death of the intellectually curious if antiquarian Isidore of Seville, more than 2,500 kilometers to the west a very different and much less conspicuous event took place. This was a pious deposition of Christian relics at Teleghma (or former Telerghma or Telerghma), which lies some forty kilometers southwest from the mighty and mountain-bound Late Roman and Byzantine provincial administrative center at Constantine in Numidia or modern northeastern Algeria. The event was roughly contemporary (between January 22 and October 4, 636, most probably on March 10) with the battle of the Yarmūk.¹ The four donor “blessed bishops” Leontius, Felix, Benenatus, and Ianuarius dutifully acknowledged their benefactor sovereigns the Emperor Heraclius and his sons Emperor Heraclius Constantine and the Caesar Heraclius (Heraclonas) and their provincial governor Peter (“for the life of whom we offer thanks”) as they scrupulously deposited relics of saints Stephan, Focas, Theodore, Victor, and Corona. Four bishops is a very significant number to participate in a deposition of relics. A thin lead sheet commemorated their actions in that event, which Martius carefully recorded and witnessed: “I Martius, a very devout man, have written and undersigned.”² That impressive inscribed lead sheet now lies on view under glass in a

¹ On the battle of Yarmūk between Byzantines and Muslims, which reached its climax in a decisive Muslim victory on August 20, 636, see Kaegi 2003c: 240–4, which modifies Kaegi 1995: 112–45, and Kaegi, sv. “Yarmūk,” *EP* vol. 11, fasc. 183–4: 290–2. Nichanian 2008. For a different yet unpersuasive chronology and topography: Woods 2007. Distance cited is by air flight, while actual distance by road would have been much longer.

² Y. Duval 1982, No. 112: I: 234–7, date: I: 236; Y. Duval 1969.

display case in the Cirta Museum, in downtown Constantine, Algeria. Those Numidian bishops who deposited these relics, depending on the precise date of deposit, may have had no awareness whatsoever of the significance for themselves, their community, and their cult of the fateful battle and campaigns that were then occurring far to the east on the edge of the Holy Land and that resulted in the permanent Byzantine loss and Muslim acquisition of Syria and Palestine. They were making another deposition of relics that had become common practice in North Africa for at least three centuries, as testify many finds on display in the museums of Algeria and Tunisia. This deposition of relics in Byzantine Numidia, which took place quite distant from the empire's Mediterranean coastlines, puts into sharp relief many issues associated with the end of Byzantine North Africa and the beginnings of the Muslim conquest of it.

Pious acts of this kind were continuing in Byzantine North Africa on the eve of dramatic political, military, and religious changes. Less than ten years later, in about 645 (or 641) another Christian deposition took place in Numidia. John, *dux* (commander) of Tigisis, an Armenian, dedicated a chapel at Timgad. It is the most famous albeit triumphal Roman archaeological site in North Africa, in another but more southerly part of Numidia.³

But less than a dozen years after the deposition of relics at Teleghma, in the late 640s, conditions had radically changed, for the early Islamic conquest of North Africa had begun. Yarmūk and other Muslim military victories had created new realities.

The Vandals had disappeared from North Africa a century earlier, together with most traces of their dominion, in the wake of the deportations and upheavals that accompanied the sixth-century Byzantine reconquest. The Catholic Church commemorated its martyrs who had suffered at the hands of the Vandals. Arianism had probably disappeared with the Vandals and the Vandal ecclesiastical hierarchy.⁴ The Vandal invasion and occupation had broken the continuity of Roman rule in Africa, but seventh-century North Africans did not look back nostalgically to the Vandal period as any golden age.⁵

³ *Ioannes dux de Tigisi* possibly in 641 or 643: *CIL* 8: 2389, 17822 = *Inscriptiones Latinae Christianae Veteres* 1832 (ed. E. Diehl, Paris: 1922–2003, vol. 1, p. 361). Gsell 1901: II: 315. *Inscriptions latines de l'Algérie*, 1, no. 17822. On John: sv. "Ioannes 252," *PLRE* 3: 705.

⁴ Reevaluation of the importance of Arianism in Vandal monarchy, with an injunction to give more serious attention to Arian missionary activity: Modéran 2003b: 21–44.

⁵ A review of the Vandal occupation: Modéran 2002; Gil Egea 1998: 452; Berndt and Steinacher 2008.

The condition of North African Christianity at the time of the Muslim conquests is complex.⁶ Precise information is difficult to obtain.⁷ No one can reliably determine how far and how meaningfully Christianity had penetrated autochthonous communities out in the countryside and mountains by the middle of the seventh century.⁸ Absent were strong and independent local bishops in North Africa like the renowned militant ones of previous centuries.⁹ It had been a long time since Augustine or since the pontificate of the last Roman pope of North African origin, Gelasius I (d. 496). The North African church had proud and venerable traditions. Churches were still being constructed and expanded, as the case of Bir el Kinissia shows in the outskirts of Carthage, or on the southern coast as demonstrated by the case of the embellishment of the church of St. Demetrius at Thena.¹⁰ Other embellishments of religious buildings took place in Numidia in the interior. Despite some possible losses due to autochthonous raids in the previous century, seventh-century North Africa, most specifically the provinces of Zeugitana/Africa Proconsularis and Byzacena (Byzacium), appears to have preserved many of the bishoprics that existed previously.¹¹ Much of the formal infrastructure of bishoprics remained on the eve of the Muslim conquest.

MONOTHELETISM, MONOPHYSITISM,
AND ORTHODOXY

Statistics do not exist for Jews or subgroups of Christians: Monothelites, Catholics, Monophysites. Identity expressed itself in culture as well as religion. Impulses to expressions of piety remained strong. Christian burials continued at Carthage in the early seventh century, as tomb chambers near the Antonine Baths attest. Christianity and the impulse to Christian piety were still vibrant in early seventh-century North Africa. The church was not in irrevocable decay and the local populations still assiduously maintained their pious practices and commitments.¹²

⁶ Markus 1992; Meyendorff 1989. ⁷ Leone 2007: 244; N. Duval 2006: 130–2.

⁸ Older discussion by Mesnage 1915: 73–84, 169–290, and reflections by Modéran 2003a: 523–34.

⁹ Conant 2004: 384–413, for observations on the perspectives of the African church during the Christological controversy. Tilley 2001: 3–22, for weaknesses within the episcopal structure. For a more positive evaluation: Handley 2004.

¹⁰ Stevens 1993: 306–8; Stevens, Kalinowski and van der Leest 2005; Bakirtzis 2000.

¹¹ *Concilium Lateranense anno 649 celebratum*, ed. R. Riedinger, *ACO* II: 1 (Berlin: 1984). See the survey and conclusions derived from the Lateran Council of 646: Benabbès 2004: 117–30.

¹² However this is not an investigation of Latin piety and spirituality in late Roman North Africa, which readers can find elsewhere in very competent and excellent monographs and surveys and articles, such as Brown 1968, 1972, 2000.

North Africa's population had been overwhelmingly Christian in the towns, cities, and coastal plains for a long time by the middle of the seventh century, although Christianity's penetration of remote autochthonous tribes was uneven. More than half a millennium later the Muslim Maghribi historian Ibn Khaldūn believed that Christianity had been imposed extraneously and precariously on autochthonous peoples by the alien *al-Faranja* (Franks) and Romans and Byzantines, who came from overseas and primarily lived along the Mediterranean coast.¹³ His was a late perspective influenced by recent hostile Maghribi experiences with Crusaders. But seventh-century Christians were far from homogeneous.¹⁴ Except among tribes, paganism had long vanished from prominence. The majority of Christians, especially the urban ones, were Catholic, as was the dominant hierarchy of bishops and clergy in the principal cities. They controlled ecclesiastical property and decision-making. However there were other Christians. In addition to Donatist communities, disputes concerning Christology (the nature of Jesus Christ) divided Christians.¹⁵ Persuasion had been at least as important as coercion in the process of Christianization, while fictive violence had been imputed by some narrators to North African Christian dissidents.¹⁶ Donatist strongholds had been concentrated away from the coasts and were especially common in Numidia, but references to them are missing in the middle and later decades of the seventh century.¹⁷ However fascinating, the role of the dissident Christian sect of Donatism in the failure of Byzantine resistance to Islam is difficult to evaluate. There is no accurate means for measuring the strength of Donatism at the start of the seventh century or later. One cannot project Donatism from its condition in 400 CE or even in the pontificate of Gregory I (590–604) to the middle of the seventh century. It is simply not prudent to speculate about undocumented subjects and the silence of the sources.

Only a few Monotheletes (or for some scholars Miathelites)¹⁸ existed in North Africa although some of their exiles, such as Pyrrhus, former Constantinopolitan patriarch, who fled to Africa c. 642 from domestic political and religious quarrels with the dominant regime, were prominent. Controversy over energy or activity and will in Christ evolved from disputes over the doctrine of the Council of Chalcedon (451) that Christ

¹³ Ibn Khaldūn, *Ta'rikh* vii: 10. ¹⁴ Lancel, sv. "Christianisme," *EB* 1942–51.

¹⁵ Gray, 2005; Maas 2003: 42–60. ¹⁶ Shaw 2006; Salzman 2006; Riggs 2006.

¹⁷ Averil Cameron 1982: 51 for a summary of views. Raynal 1997; Friend 2004: 265–9. North African rural situation of fourth- and early fifth-century Christian communities: Dossey 1998.

¹⁸ Monotheletes believed in one will in Jesus Christ: Larison 2009; Hovorun 2008: 53–162.

is one hypostasis in two natures. Monotheletism was not necessarily any compromise political formulation, it was not necessarily any attempt to bridge a gap between Chalcedonian and anti-Chalcedonian theologies. Instead it was an affirmation of a particular orthodoxy. It was a triumphalist insistence on Heraclian sponsored doctrines as the best defense of the unity of Christ and the truth of the Christological doctrine of Chalcedon. It was an aggressive attempt endorsed by Constantinopolitan Patriarchs Sergius and Pyrrhus and Emperor Heraclius to appropriate the language of one activity in Christ away from their adversaries (especially Monophysitic ones) as a means of depriving them of the grounds for their objections to Chalcedon and as a vehicle for imposing religious uniformity throughout the empire. After initial experimentation with formulations of Monoenergism in 633 and the succeeding several years, formal Monotheletism found its expression in the imperial decree by Heraclius of the *Ekthesis* in 638. Patriarch Sergius convoked a synod at Constantinople in late 638 to validate the *Ekthesis*, which prohibited any debate on the number of *energeiai* (activities) in Christ. Christ's single will was openly proclaimed. In a letter to the Patriarch Sergius, Pope Honorius had previously approved Patriarch Sergius' doctrine of a single will.¹⁹ The deaths of both Patriarch Sergius and Pope Honorius in 638 in the waning fluid moments of Emperor Heraclius' reign contributed to acerbic flare-ups. Sergius' successor Patriarch Pyrrhus supported the *Ekthesis* and Monotheletism, as did Heraclius. The most prominent hard-line opponent of Monotheletism was the monk Maximus the Confessor, who initially supported some earlier theological positions of Patriarch Sergius that condemned language of one or two activities in Christ. Maximus began to speak out against Monoenergism, Monotheletism, and the *Ekthesis* in 640 in North Africa, where he had been residing since about 630.²⁰ After the overthrow of Martina and her family in 641 at Constantinople, Pyrrhus was exiled to North Africa, where he unsuccessfully sought to convince Maximus the Confessor of the validity of his theological positions. After the decease of Pope Honorius, the new pope Severinus, who lived only two more months, and the overwhelming majority of North African and other Catholic clergy rejected Monotheletism and the *Ekthesis*. Severinus' successor Pope John IV (December 24, 640 – October 12, 642) and a Roman synod also condemned Monoenergism, Monotheletism, and the *Ekthesis*.

¹⁹ Hovorun 2008: 72–3.

²⁰ Louth 1996: 5–17. *Ekthesis* text: Allen 2009: 208–17.

A flood of Monophysite refugees and involuntary exiles from the east, most notably from Syria and Palestine, added to the sectarian diversity and controversy of communities and even monasteries in the middle of the seventh century. Their swelling numbers exacerbated tensions and unease. The newcomers represented disruptive change with their new customs, appearances, and dialects. Monks included Dyophysites (those who believed that Jesus was both human and divine in nature) as well as Monophysites, or as some prefer, Miaphysites (those who believed in one composite nature in Jesus Christ). Some Dyophysite monks had migrated from Palestine to North Africa in the wake of the disruptions that resulted from the Persian invasion and occupation in the second decade of the century and more followed in the wake of the Muslim occupation of western Asia and Egypt.²¹ There is no reliable estimate of Monophysite refugees in seventh-century Africa. Their teachings did not persuade the Latin or autochthonous population to switch to communion with them or to accept their theology.²² They remained a minority.

Strident opponents of Monotheletism and Monophysitism included such prominent and well-informed ecclesiastical leaders as Maximus the Confessor and Sophronius, who became Patriarch of Jerusalem.²³ Maximus triumphed decisively in a vigorous public debate with Constantinopolitan Patriarch Pyrrhus in Carthage in July 645, over which debate Exarch Gregory presided.²⁴ Gregory rebelled against Constans II following that public disputation. Pyrrhus departed from Carthage for Rome, where he initially sought reconciliation with Rome, and was received into orthodox confession by Pope Theodore. Pyrrhus returned to Africa but after Exarch Gregory's decisive defeat at the hands of the Muslims in 647, Pyrrhus traveled back to Italy where he reconciled himself with Monotheletes in imperially controlled Ravenna. Pope Theodore excommunicated him but died (May 14, 649). Pope Martin I, who succeeded Theodore, convoked a Lateran Council in October 649 in which 105 bishops, including many from Italy and Africa, condemned two imperial edicts on Christology: Heraclius' *Ektthesis* and Constans II's *Typus*. The outcome of all this was much ecclesiastical turbulence and political aftershocks in Italy, North Africa, and other regions of the empire.

²¹ Flusin 1992: II: 367–8. ²² Frend 1972.

²³ Dagron 2003: 167–83; Bathrellos 2004: 60–98.

²⁴ Hefele and Leclercq 1909: III.1: 402–25; 1925: 437–8. Precedents for public disputation of theology in the presence of officials: Lim 1995: 103–8; Averil Cameron 1991b: 102–3; Averil Cameron 1992b: 98.

It is inappropriate here to recount all of these events, but they complicated local and imperial efforts to shape any coherent unified policies to bring Christians together and to shape support for the imperial government against the Muslims. Matters worsened. Maximus departed from Africa for Rome, where Olympius, the Byzantine Exarch of Ravenna, arrested him in 653 and deported him for trial in Constantinople, which took place in 655. Sophronius, a close friend and associate of Maximus, also resided in North Africa probably in the late 610s and early 620s, and again between 630 and 633, before he assumed the prestigious and venerable Patriarchate of Jerusalem.²⁵ Sophronius and Maximus brought issues, frames of reference, and information from the east, including from Palestine.²⁶ Maximus' relations with figures at the court of Constans II were limited to John the Cubicularius and Constantine the Sacellarius. His extensive relationships with major figures in North Africa owed much to his own disciple Anastasius, the former notary of an ancestor of Constans II. That ancestor was more likely the wife of Nicetas, cousin of Heraclius, who originated in North Africa (and less likely Fabia/Eudocia, the grandmother of Constans II, who also originated in Africa). Anastasius the notary himself was probably a bilingual North African. The fundamental community in which Maximus lived and with whom he was associated was that of Palestinian monastics.²⁷

Vigorous imperial support for Monotheletism failed to eliminate dissent in North Africa. Relations effectively broke down between churches in the west and the east. Hostility within the North African Catholic Church to Monotheletic doctrines was not limited to Carthage and its vicinity. The influential ecclesiastical structure in other North African provinces rejected doctrines of Constantinopolitan Patriarch Pyrrhus and reported their rejections to papal authority in Rome. Meanwhile Maximus brought news to Rome of several African church councils' opposition to the *Ekthesis*. In 646 metropolitan bishops in Mauretania (unspecified which diocese in which province of Mauretania), Numidia, and Byzacium (Byzacena) reportedly held synods or local councils that rejected Monotheletic doctrines of Constantinopolitan Patriarch Pyrrhus. These local conciliar decisions were relayed to Pope Theodore.²⁸ These acts, if genuine, testify

²⁵ Debate: *PG* 91: 287–354. Biographies: Averil Cameron 1982: 55.

²⁶ Boudignon 2004: 33; sv. "Anastasios (Monachos)," no. 237, *PMBZ* 1: 77.

²⁷ Boudignon 2004: 33–4. Bathrellos 2004: 99–174. On Greek culture in Byzantine North Africa, including communications with Palestine: Averil Cameron 1993: 159–63, esp. on Palestinian ties.

²⁸ *Concilium Lateranense a. 649 celebratum*, 66, 70, 74–76. *Synodicon Vetus*, ed. and trans. J. Duffy and J. Parker (Washington, DC: 1979) 133–6, pp. 110–13.

to the vigor of Christianity in three major North African provinces in the middle of the 640s. Probably bishops in those provinces in fact did reject Monotheletic theological formulations and related imperial proclamations. However their textual authenticity has aroused scholarly skepticism. On the surface the acts appear to indicate unanimous, solid, and cohesive rejection of Monotheletic doctrines throughout the ecclesiastical leadership in all of North Africa's provinces. They also interestingly would testify to the survival of some kind of ecclesiastical hierarchy in poorly known Mauretania. But they may be doctored by Greek monks sympathetic to Maximus the Confessor. The historian cannot depend on these acts and traditions to understand the identities, hierarchy, constituency, and politics of the bishops and the broader historical context in North Africa on the eve of the arrival of the Muslims.²⁹ Caution is necessary concerning empirical details.

Broader events as well as ecclesiastical decisions shaped the environment of North Africa in the late seventh century. In 648 Emperor Constans II on the advice of Constantinopolitan Patriarch Paul promulgated the *Typos*, an edict. It prohibited any discussion of Christ's one or two wills or energies. Constans II continued to support Monotheletism. In October 649 a council of 105 bishops was held in the Lateran basilica in Rome. It confirmed the doctrine of two *energeiai* (activities, energies) and two wills in Christ, condemned the *Ekthesis* and the *Typos*, and anathematized theologians whose arguments supported Monotheletism: Theodore of Pharan, Cyril of Alexandria, Patriarchs Sergius, Pyrrhus, and Paul of Constantinople. Ravenna Exarch Olympius failed to arrest Pope Martin I, but Exarch Theodore Kalliopas arrested Martin, who was taken to Constantinople for trial in 655, and accordingly deposed, defrocked and then exiled to Chersonese in the Crimea, where he died on September 16, 655. Maximus the Confessor was arrested, tortured, and exiled to Lazica where he died on August 13, 662. Constantinopolitan Patriarch Peter (June 8, 654 – October 12, 666) convened a council that anathematized Maximus, Martin I, and Sophronius, and proclaimed a *Psephos* that listed the results of the council. Pope Eugenius I (August 10, 654 – June 2, 657) and his successor Vitalian (July 3, 657 – January 27, 672) restored communion with Patriarch Peter, who was a Monothelete. Constantine IV convoked a council of bishops. Pope Donus died April 11, 678 before the council took place, but newly elected Pope Agatho (June 27, 678 – January 10, 681)

²⁹ *Concilium Lateranense a. 649 celebratum*, no. 1163, *PMBZ*. Riedinger 1998. But Conte 1989: 31–148.

accepted the decision. Patriarch George I (December 679 – February 686) persuaded Constantine IV to transform the conference into the sixth ecumenical council, which began November 7, 680 and ended September 16, 681. It condemned all teachings on the single *energeia* (energy) and will of Christ and Pope Honorius, Sergius, Pyrrhus, Peter, Cyrus the Patriarch of Alexandria, Theodore of Pharan, Macarius the deposed Patriarch of Antioch, and Apergius of Perge. Constantine IV issued an edict that affirmed the decisions of the council. Monotheletism did not completely disappear after this council. It enjoyed a short revival in the middle of the second decade of the eighth century at Constantinople.

Disputing Christians found no resolution in North Africa for differences over the issue of one will or energy in Christ. Representatives of the imperial government claimed that opponents of Monotheletism used the issue as an excuse to withhold support for the government's efforts to organize North Africans to take measures to resist the Muslims militarily in North Africa and in Egypt.

Christianity was so flourishing and important in North Africa and nevertheless later disappeared so completely that the fate of Christianity in North Africa is an important and puzzling one to many scholars. The Christian communities in North Africa did not vanish completely immediately following the Muslim conquest. They probably disappeared contemporaneously with the Crusades as part of a long and slow process. But the eventual total disappearance of local Christian communities in North Africa, in contrast to the survival of significant Christian minorities in Syria, Palestine, Egypt, and even in Iraq, which was never Byzantine, is noteworthy.³⁰ But this is not a study of that post-conquest long and slow disappearance of North African Christianity, which is an important topic for others to discuss elsewhere.³¹ In retrospect, the greatest North African historian, Ibn Khaldūn, regarded Christianity as a religion of alterity, one that alien Franks, Romans, and Byzantines temporarily, imperfectly, and haltingly imposed by force on some of the autochthonous inhabitants of North Africa until the Muslim conquests induced Frankish and Byzantine flight back across the Mediterranean.³² In his view, the Franks and Byzantines confined their habitation to the coast. This was an

³⁰ Mesnage 1915. Lengthy survival of Christianity in North Africa after the arrival of the Muslims: Talbi 1990.

³¹ Cuoq 1984: 92–156; Courtois 1942; Courtois 1945: 97–122, 193–226; de Planhol 1995. On the importance of Christianity in North Africa, see Monceaux 1902 and publications by P. Brown, G. Clarke, and C.-A. Julien.

³² Ibn Khaldūn, *Ta'rikh* VII: 10.

historical interpretation from the understandably narrow perspective and local memories of the early fourteenth century.

The doctrinal state of Christianity at the time of the Muslim conquests was troubled throughout the empire. The church experienced much turbulence because of imperial and patriarchal efforts to impose Monotheletism on an unwilling and proud Catholic episcopate and laity in North Africa and in Italy.³³ However Monotheletism represented a serious Christological theology for some contemporaries, for it was not merely an imperial puppet cult. The theological issues that it raised need reflection and not mere dismissal.³⁴

The most prominent seventh-century ecclesiastics in North Africa were Greek and came from the eastern Mediterranean, not North Africa. Of course the sources, which tend to reflect perspectives of Constantinople or Rome, may simply avoid giving attention to local church personalities. The broader urban situation is becoming clearer despite many gaps.³⁵ Public space became reduced in Byzantine towns and cities of North Africa in what was a process of gradual evolution rather than any sharp rupture on the eve of the arrival of Islam.³⁶ Late Antique Christianity in North Africa had already altered patterns of communal use of and visualization of space.³⁷

TRAUMA, HOPES, AND ANXIETIES AMID CRISIS

The province of Zeugitana/Africa Proconsularis or at least the Carthage region suffered from the plague, probably in the 620s.³⁸ Some insight into local mentalities of that era comes from a rare text in the corpus of the writings in Greek of St. Anastasius Sinaita (late seventh century), which is reproduced later in the Constantinople *Synaxarium*, where the terrors of the specters of black Ethiopians in a vision are prominent.³⁹ One should not push analysis of the story too far, but the localization of the story in Africa probably less than two decades before the beginning of the Muslim

³³ Hodgkin 1967: vi: 18–20, 238–83. On Monotheletism: Winkelmann 1987; Duchesne 1925: 437–40, 453–8; Meyendorff 1989.

³⁴ Alternative opinion: Elert 1957; Larison 2009; Hovorun 2008: 53–162.

³⁵ Ennabli 1997. ³⁶ Mahjoubi 2000: 239–46.

³⁷ Yasin 2002 makes important observations on this process in North Africa especially at Upenna and Ammaedara.

³⁸ Little 2007.

³⁹ Vision of Ethiopians as evil devils, in Alexandria, Egypt: Efthymiadis 1995: 21–23, trans. 27–28; and Karpozilos 1993. Byron 2002: 44–5, 77–80, 85–103; Mayerson 1978: 308–10; A. P. Johnson 2006: 179–200.

conquest, that is, in the 620s, does suggest some of the tensions that probably existed between the Latin and Greek urbanized elites (the subject was a *taxeotes*, soldier) and some parts of the autochthonous African population. Such terrors might well also have become conflated with those of the imminent Muslim expeditions. The tradition may indicate a local propensity to be frightened about the kinds of people who would be among (but not exclusively populate) the invading Muslim armies. The story also indicates, and this appears to be corroborated by recent archaeological work in Carthage,⁴⁹ that the population was declining inside Carthage but growing in its suburbs in the seventh century:

In the years of the Patrician Nicetas such a wonder occurred in Carthage, in Africa. A certain *taxeotes* [soldier/sergeant] passed time in the prison/praetorium in many sins. A deadly plague having fallen on the city, he became bewildered and went out to his suburb with his own wife, fleeing from the death there. But the devil ever envying the salvation and repentance of men, throwing him into sin, caused him to have sex with the wife of his farmer. After a few days he died, stricken by the plague. There was a monastery a mile distant, in which the wife of the soldier summoned the monks, and coming and taking the remains, they buried them in the church, at the third hour. And chanting at the ninth hour, they heard from the depths a voice saying: "Have mercy on me, have mercy on me." And following the sound of the voice, they came to his tomb, and opening it they found the *taxeotes* crying out. At once they brought him up, and loosening the winding sheets and the bandages, they questioned him, wishing to know what he saw and what had happened to him. He was unable to speak from the number of his lamentations and asked them to take him to the servant of God Thalassius who embellished all of Africa ... Thalassius the revered father of Africa comforted him and devoted his attention to him for three days, and after four days he scarcely was able to correct his tongue because of his many wailings and he spoke weeping in this way: "When my soul was about to depart I saw some frightening Ethiopians standing over me. Of which merely the concept of all the punishment was worse, which seeing the soul shuddered and withdrew to itself. And while these things stood by me I saw two beautiful youths come, at the mere sight of whom my soul immediately leaped out to their hands. As though we were in flight we were raised up and found a toll-booth guarding the exit and each toll-booth in the air took account of my sin. They examined every sin of mine, one the lies, another the envy, another the arrogance, in order. When I was taken up by one of them I saw them carry as into a bath all my deeds and juxtapose the good ones against my bad ones, which they brought to the heavenly toll-booth. Having paid out all of my good deeds, we reached the road leading up to the toll-booth of fornication near the gate to heaven. Seizing me they brought forth every fornication and fleshly sin I committed since the age of twelve. Those who

⁴⁹ Professor Susan Stevens of Randolph Macon College so informs me.

brought me said, 'God forgave all those bodily sins he committed in the city, for he took refuge from them and left the city.' My denunciators said 'after he left the city he fell into fornication with the wife of a farmer in the suburbs.' When the angels heard this and found nothing to give up against it, they abandoned me and departed. Then those Ethiopians seized me and struck me and dragged me under the ground. The earth split open and we went through narrow and gloomy places where the souls of sinners were locked up in underground prisons and jails of Hades ... And locked up and in narrow and dark and in the shadow of death I remained there weeping and closed up from the first until the ninth hour. And at about the ninth hour I saw those two saintly angels who led me out of my body appearing there. I began to cry out to them and to complain/lament, to ask them to take me from that place of need/necessity that I might turn to God ... Taking heed of me who cried out with need and promised to repent/change, then one said to the other one: 'Will you reply to him that he may repent willingly to God?' And he said, 'I shall answer.' Then immediately the responder gave me his right hand. Then taking me up they raised me in the earth and brought me into the tomb and said to me, 'Enter what you exited.' I saw my own nature as a jewel crystal radiating forth, but I saw my body as mud and foul-smelling and dark filth and I was displeased and did not want to enter it. But they said to me: 'It is impossible for you to change in any way unless you do so through your body, through which you sinned. Have faith and enter your body, so that you accomplish what you suffer, or let us turn away whence we took you. In order that you may enter.' At any rate I entered it, and my body took on life/breathed life into my body, and I began to cry out" ...

The great Thalassius urged him to take food but he would not accept it, only throwing himself on the place in the church on his face and confessing to God. Saying this and living still forty days without food, groaning and weeping and crying, "Woe to sinners and for the punishment that awaits them, especially those who profane their own flesh." So he acted, and departed to the Lord, foreseeing three days in advance his own death again.⁴¹

This saintly narrative probably circulated from the circles of monks close to Maximus the Confessor and Thalassios and spread to the circle of St. Anastasius the Sinaite, who lived under Muslim rule in late seventh-century Egypt, at Mount Sinai. The story is an interesting example of what was circulating among Chalcedonian Christian monks from one end of the

⁴¹ Anastasius the Sinaite, "Le texte grec des récits du moine Anastase sur les saints pères du Sinai," ed. F. Nau, *Oriens Christianus* 2 (1902): 83-7; revised later versions in *Synaxarium ecclesiae Constantinopolitanae*, ed. H. Delchaye (1902, repr. 1964): 638-9; and Georgius Monachus, *Chronicon*, ed. C. De Boor (Leipzig: 1904): 678-83. Anastasius was a seventh-century saint, so he recorded this story probably within a few decades of its occurrence. Thalassius flourished c. 630-4; C. Laga and C. Steel, introduction to their edition of *Maximi Confessoris Quaestiones ad Thalassium*, CC, Series Graeca 7 (Leuven: 1990): ix; cf. Sherwood 1952: 33-5. Plague in the reign of Heraclius: Miracle 34, *The Miracles of St. Artemios*, 178-9, cf. 48.

Mediterranean to the other shortly before and after the Islamic conquests. So great fears accompanied the plague and other disruptions that were contemporary with the campaigns that brought Heraclius to victory and that otherwise brought triumphal joy to the empire's subjects. Accordingly scraps of Africa became encapsulated in later Byzantine memory.

Some features of North Africa at the moment of the initial seventh-century Muslim expeditions stand out.⁴² Traumas had shaken North Africa. The intoxicating triumphalism and optimism that accompanied the initial Byzantine reconquest of Africa from the Vandals had long dissipated, in the wake of military and autochthonous rebellions, autochthonous raiding, fiscal strains, and ecclesiastical disputes.⁴³ Now lesser expectations and faded hopes prevailed in Constantinople, Carthage, and Constantine. The empire's North African subjects could still see and circulate handsome new silver hexagrams that were being struck at the mint in distant Constantinople in mid-century (reign of Constans II). These hexagrams, which Heraclius had begun to coin in 616, voiced familiar but anxious invocations of divine aid in a time of crisis: "May God help the Romans," *Deus adiuta Romanis* (see Figure 1).⁴⁴

Copper *folles* (coins) struck at Constantinople and at Carthage proclaimed the message that, according to the retrospective testimony of Eusebius of Caesarea, first inspired Constantine I to decisive victory over his imperial opponent Maxentius: "By this conquer (ἐν τούτῳ νικά)." ⁴⁵ But harsher realities derived from the deteriorating military and fiscal situation.

Byzantine North Africa was not expansionist in the early seventh century.⁴⁶ Its civil and ecclesiastical leaders and inhabitants in theory wished peace, not war, as they had done in the late sixth century: "We pray for peace and after the wars, rest" (*oramus pacem et placidam post bella quietem*), as the late sixth-century African poet Corippus expressed their

⁴² On Africa: Kaegi 2002: 15–28. Older survey: Belkhdja 1970: 55–65.

⁴³ Procopius, *Anecdota* 18.

⁴⁴ Morrisson 1970: I: 257, 272–3, 329. p. 342. Constans II catalog Type 1 *AO*1, Type 2 *AO*2–08, p. 343, Type 4 *AO*9–17; Type 5 *AO*18–19 p. 344. Constantine IV p. 381 Type 1 *AO*1, Type 2 *AO*2–06; Type 3 *AO*7–08, p. 382; Grierson, *DO Cat* 11.2 Nos. 48.1–[58], pp. 11.2 437–42. None known to have been struck at Carthage mint. But some hexagrams were struck at Ravenna: *DO Cat* 11.2, No. 203, dated to 654–9, p. 507.

⁴⁵ Constantinople: Grierson, *DO Cat* 11.2, Constans II, pp. 442–53, Nos. 59a–78b; Carthage: *DO Cat* 11.2 Constans II, pp. 476–7, Nos. 134–6. C. Morrisson, *BN Cat* 1: 320–1, 331–3, 344–8, 355–6 Eusebius, *Vita Constantini* 1.28.2. Whether the victory of Constantine I over Maxentius had special reverberations in Africa, especially in the city of Constantine (formerly Circa) that the emperor rebuilt after its destruction in the civil war with Maxentius, is unknown.

⁴⁶ Treadgold 2006: 211–18.

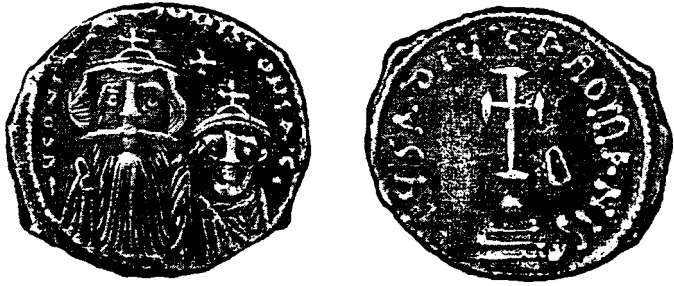


Figure 1. Hexagram of Constans II. Constantinople. Date: 654–9. *DO Cat* 2.2 no.55.3 BZC 60.125.1118.D2209. © Dumbarton Oaks, Byzantine Collection, Washington, DC.

mood.⁴⁷ Relentless international strife and competition did not allow the peaceful hopes of North Africans to become a permanent reality. As the Maghribi historian Ibn Khaldūn commented eight centuries later without any special reference to the Byzantine era, each regime in North Africa wished peace but ultimately succumbed to more martial successor regimes. In one sense, Byzantine rule was another of many cycles of hegemonic authority in North Africa.⁴⁸

Mosaic inscriptions from earlier centuries of Late Antiquity also express the pacific sentiments that Corippus versified. They eloquently testify to the long-held yearning of North African Christians for *pax* (peace) and *concordia* (concord). *In Deo pax et concordia sit convivio nostro* (translation: “Through God may peace and concord preside at our banquet,” or “Under the protection of God this banquet sees peace and concord reign”) was the aspiration in an inscription at Tipasa (Caesariensis, Algerian coast) that did not always materialize.⁴⁹ *Pax ecclesiae* (peace *off* for the church) was also the wish inscribed in a (?late?) fourth-century mosaic pavement from a basilica at Beni Rached (Chlef region, western Algeria) that now adorns the Museum of Antiquities in Algiers.⁵⁰ At Clypea (Kelibia, Cape Bon, Tunisia) an inscription on a baptistery invoked *pax, fides*,

⁴⁷ Corippus, *Iohannidos*, 6.407 (*Iohannidos Libri VIII*, ed. J. Diggle and F. R. D. Goodyear [Cambridge: 1970] 129). Prominence of defensive activity in late Roman warfare in general: Whitby 2005, “War,” *CHGRW* 310–17.

⁴⁸ The wish of mature Maghribi regimes for repose and peace: Ibn Khaldūn, *Ta’rikh* 1: 177, also 1: 180, but in general on phases, 1: 176–93. *The Muqaddimah*, trans. F. Rosenthal (New York: 1958, 2nd edn., repr. 1980) 1: 336–45, esp. 1: 339.

⁴⁹ Inscription in archaeological museum of Tipasa, Algeria. See Février 1977: 29–45; Février 1996: 1: 21–37. For photograph, Blas de Robles and Sintes 2003: 71.

⁵⁰ Information supplied by Mme Naima Abdelouahab, Musée des Antiquités, Algiers.

caritas.¹¹ Despite longings for peace, that old gap between North African hopes and realities persisted into the seventh century. Ecclesiastical disunity spilled over into political and military spheres, with negative consequences. Peace was not at hand within or without ecclesiastical communities.

Exarch Gregory may well have calculated that unrest at and around Constantinople would preoccupy the teenager Constans II and leave him and his imperial advisors little effective opportunity to suppress usurpation in distant North Africa. That political and military unrest coincided with ecclesiastical and fiscal grievances. Hence Gregory decided to take advantage of the weakness of the imperial court. The contemporary (beginning of the 640s) Lombard seizure of Liguria in Northern Italy, which Byzantium had occupied since the Justinianic reconquest of Italy, reconfirmed and increased imperial vulnerability even in North Africa. Moreover, Gregory supported the theological positions of Maximus the Confessor and the African ecclesiastical councils of 646 that enabled Maximus and his theological allies to affirm his views. Gregory showed a close personal interest and commitment to reaching a correct decision on Christology, for he was present at the debate in 646 between the exiled Monotheletic Pyrrhus, former Patriarch of Constantinople, and the outspoken Chalcedonian apologist Maximus the Confessor at Carthage. The assassination of the Commander of the Believers 'Umar in 644 may even have raised false hope in North Africa's Christian community for decisive distraction and paralysis among the Muslims. The rebellion of Gregory alerted Muslims to discord within the ranks of North Africans and their rulers, but no extant Muslim source mentions North African internal religious discord as a catalyst for Muslim raiding.

IMPEDIMENTS FROM RELIGIOUS SCAPEGOATING

Even more pertinent, serious religious impediments confronted efforts to develop a swift and coherent Byzantine and Romano-African defense. Heraclius had ordered Byzantine forces in Numidia under General Peter to move to the assistance of beleaguered Egypt, probably in 633, but reportedly because of the opposition of Maximus the Confessor, Peter had refused.¹²

¹¹ Raynal 1997: 79–80.

¹² *Maximus the Confessor and His Companions: Documents from Exile*, ed. and trans. P. Allen and B. Neil (Oxford: 2002): 48–51.

Imperial repression of Jews and tensions between Catholics and Jews negatively affected the development of any coherent resistance to Muslims. However the role of Jews was not the decisive element in the outcome. Jews in North Africa belonged to a well-informed and well-connected religious community, with ties that spanned the Mediterranean. Jews suffered harsh disabilities, especially in some North African urban centers. Justinian I forbade the construction of synagogues and practice of Jewish rites.⁵³ The small Jewish community was subjected to harsh pressures.⁵⁴ Although these policies were not enforced consistently, on May 31, 632 the Prefect of Africa compelled the baptism of Jews at Carthage, in conformity with imperial instructions.⁵⁵ The *Doctrina Jacobi* reported that Emperor Heraclius ordered Jews to be baptized everywhere.⁵⁶ The scope and intent of this decree is controversial. It is however consistent with Emperor Heraclius' efforts to achieve religious uniformity among his subjects, but there may also be in it an expression of reaction against the influx of herodox and alien constituencies in the wake of the Persian War (603–28) and of course it may reflect hostility to allegations of Jewish misconduct and atrocities in the Holy Land during the Persian occupation.

The proclamation of the Heraclian decree against Jews at Carthage dragged North Africa into the recriminations and ugly aftermath of tensions in Palestine between Jews and Christians in the wake of the protracted Byzantine–Persian war (603–28).⁵⁷ Anti-Jewish sentiments and policies were not unique to North Africa. Hostility against Jews was already high during and perhaps because of the pontificate of Honorius (625–38).⁵⁸ Jews also received blame for alleged participation in the troubles at Constantinople during the imperial succession crisis that immediately followed the coronation of young Constans II in 641.⁵⁹ Jews and other unbelievers had allegedly participated in the crowding and profaning of

⁵³ *Just. Nov.* 375–8 (August 1, 535), for example, but it probably ceased to be enforced. See also, for town of Borion in Tripolitania, Procopius, *Buildings* 6.2.11, 6.2.22–3. Juster 1914: 251, no. 1; Stern 2006.

⁵⁴ *Just. Nov.* 37 (August 1, 535 CE), to Solomon, Praetorian Prefect of Africa) for prohibitions on the holding of Jewish religious services in Africa. “[Iudaeis ...] Sed neque synagogas eorum stare concedimus, sed ad ecclesiarum figuram eas volumus reformari. Neque enim Iudaeos neque paganos neque Donatistas neque Arianos neque alios quoscumque haereticos vel speluncas habere vel quaedam quasi ritu ecclesiasticae facere patimur, cum hominibus impiis sacra peragenda satis absurdum est.” It is unclear how consistently this prohibition was applied by authorities between the reign of Justinian I and that of Heraclius, but hostile relations between Jews and the African church antedated the 630s. See Rabello 1987–8, II: 797–801; Gray 1993.

⁵⁵ Dagron and Déroche 1991: 32–3; Devreesse 1937; Starr 1940; Averil Cameron 1996.

⁵⁶ *Doctrina Jacobi*, Dagron and Déroche, 1.2 (70–1 Dagron).

⁵⁷ Kaegi 2003c: 216–17. ⁵⁸ Durliat 1988: 72.

⁵⁹ Nicephorus, *Short History* c. 31 (82–3 Mango).

the altar at Hagia Sophia Church, which contributed to the decision of Patriarch Pyrrhus to leave Constantinople for Carthage. The incident and the reports inflamed passions. Efforts to enforce such compulsion harmed social cohesion and morale and thereby contributed to intellectual and religious disruption and turmoil in North Africa on the eve of the Muslim invasions.⁶⁰ Maximus the Confessor criticized the measure and feared for the future.⁶¹ North Africa had a long tradition, since the late second and third centuries, of anti-Jewish polemics in Latin, one disproportionately greater than some other regions of the Roman Empire. It is uncertain how much of that old Latin anti-Jewish polemic still circulated and was active in the consciousness of North Africans in the seventh century.⁶² Jews had long suffered from restrictive measures in North Africa, indeed since the Byzantine reconquest in the sixth century. But in the east contemporary Syriac Christian literature also contains virulent anti-Jewish sentiments.⁶³

Even though he disapproved of the government's compulsory conversions of Jews, Maximus the Confessor in North Africa in the same year 632 raged against Jews for allegedly sympathizing with contemporary Saracen or Arab military victories:

What is worse than the evils that assail the world today? What is more terrible for those who notice them than the unfolding events? What is more pitiable and frightening for those who experience them? To see a barbarous nation from the desert pass through another's land as though as it was their property, to see civilization itself ravaged by ferocious and savage beasts who have only the simple physical appearance of human beings. To see the Jewish people who have long liked to see human bloodshed, who know no other means to please God than to kill his creation, who are the most faithless people on earth and who are for that reason completely ready to welcome enemy forces, who in every way follow the arrival of evil, who show by their acts the presence of the Antichrist since they have not recognized the true Saviour. They are a malevolent, unjust people who hate men as much as God, who find themselves permitted to sate their envy by outraging the saints because punishment is approaching, in order that they be more justly punished, the facts themselves make clear their arbitrariness and rebellion against God, this people who are the masters of falsehood, the agents of crime, the enemies of truth, the cruel persecutors of the faith ...⁶⁴

⁶⁰ Averil Cameron 1996: 248–67. Olster 1994. ⁶¹ Devreesse 1937: 33–5.

⁶² Brief survey of earlier anti-Jewish tracts in Latin North Africa: Andrist 2001: 86–8, 101–6.

⁶³ Hayman 1985: 423–41; Fiey 1988: 933–53.

⁶⁴ Maximus the Confessor, *Ep.* 14, *PG* 91, col. 537–540.

Maximus envisaged events and even Jewish actions and attitudes as all part of the turmoil that accompanies an eschatological sign and moment. In any case, his fulminations against Jews can only have complicated matters and exacerbated tensions between religious communities in North Africa on the eve of the arrival of the Muslims.

Ecclesiastical leaders and parish priests may have attempted to encourage resistance to Muslims in Byzantine Egypt, but any such efforts quickly failed.⁶⁵ Cyrus, the controversial Monotheletic Patriarch of Alexandria, was unable to marshal and to solidify any effective resistance.⁶⁶ Seventh-century Egyptian provincialism and localized Christian traditions do not indicate that local populations were conscious of any substantial options in reacting to the arrival of Muslim troops.⁶⁷ So Egypt offered no good precedents for North African Christians to develop resistance. The only example of a successful seventh-century defense against the Muslims would be that of Anatolia, and the outcome of that struggle was still indeterminate while the battle for North Africa was taking place. Later cases of effective resistance in Gaul were irrelevant for the seventh century. Byzantine and North Africans had to devise their own defenses without much in the way of external examples.

When in the early 630s the Muslim Arabs or simply Arabs began to threaten Byzantine Egypt, Heraclius, no doubt because he remembered the strategic situation of Africa from his earlier life there and from the start of his own rebellion against Phocas, not surprisingly attempted to assist the defense of beleaguered Egypt by attempting to shift Byzantine troops from Numidia (part of what is Algeria today). He ordered General Peter to move them, but the latter declined to do so allegedly because of the opposition of the Chalcedonian rejectionist Maximus the Confessor to Heraclius' Monotheletic theological policies.⁶⁸ Such was the report within the army, as it was testified at Maximus' trial, by John, former *sacellarius* (treasurer) of Peter, General of Numidia, when Maximus demanded the production of documents to prove the allegation. This is a rare testimonial to the gossip mills of the Byzantine army. No precise

⁶⁵ Photiades 1963: 234–5 is a possible source.

⁶⁶ Kaegi 2003c: 284–6; Hoyland 1997: 574–90. ⁶⁷ Zaborowski 2003: 100–15.

⁶⁸ *Maximus the Confessor and His Companions*: 49–51; Maximus the Confessor, "Relatio factae motionis inter domnum Maximum monachum et socium eius coram principibus in secretario," *Scripta saeculi vii vitam Maximi Confessoris Illustrantia*, ed. P. Allen and B. Neil, CC, Ser. Gr. 39 (Turnhout: 1999): 12–15; Maximus the Confessor, *The Life of Maximus the Confessor. Recension 3*, ed. and trans. B. Neil and P. Allen, Early Christian Studies 6 (Strathfield, Australia: 2003), cc. 51–2, pp. 140–3, = *PG* 90: 112. On Peter: Y. Duval 1971; also, sv. "Petrus 709," *PLRE* 3: 1013. On the heritage of controversy after the Council of Chalcedon: Gray 2005.

testimony exists about later rumors or opinion within the Byzantine army, but probably soldiers held some opinions on the North African military situation, whether or not they were based on facts. Military opinions created their own realities.

The imperial government brought political charges against religious dissenters. If one trusts the extant account of the political trial of the ascetic Maximus the Confessor in 655 at Constantinople, over which the *sacellarius* Boukoleon presided, already by that time the imperial government and the dynasty and their apologists were claiming that Africa was lost to the Saracens or Muslims because of the nefarious and treacherous actions and advice of the religious dissenter Maximus the Confessor.⁶⁹ Maximus received blame for betraying Egypt, Pentapolis, Tripolis, and Africa (Zeugitana, Africa Proconsularis) to the Muslims. At the imperial palace in Constantinople the finance minister subsequently accused Maximus:

"single-handedly you betrayed Egypt, Alexandria, Pentapolis, Tripolis and Africa to the Saracens." "And what's the proof of those charges?" he said. And they produced John, former finance minister of Peter, the former general of Numidia in Africa, who said: "Twenty-two years ago the emperor's grandfather [Heraclius] ordered blessed Peter to take an army and go off to Egypt against the Saracens, and he wrote to you, as if he were speaking to a servant of God, having confidence in you as a holy person [to enquire] if you counseled him to set off. And you wrote back to him saying he should do nothing of the sort, because God did not approve lending aid to the Roman Empire during the reign of Heraclius and his kin."⁷⁰

This was an exaggeration and contained more than one distortion for the regime's polemical purposes. The unsuccessful effort to order Peter, commander in Numidia,⁷¹ to move his forces to the assistance of beleaguered Egypt probably took place in 633.⁷²

Imperial officials likewise put responsibility on Pope Martin I in late 653 for treasonous activity with the Ravenna Exarch (Byzantine governor

⁶⁹ This account was circulated in association with the acts of the Sixth Ecumenical Council at Constantinople, 681.

⁷⁰ *Maximus the Confessor and His Companions*: 48–51; Maximus the Confessor, "Relatio": 12–15; esp. *The Life of Maximus the Confessor*: cc. 51–2, pp. 140–3. Alternative translations: "For you alone betrayed Egypt and Alexandria and Pentapolis and Tripoli and Africa to the Saracens." Again: "And you wrote a reply to him, saying 'Do not do this, since God does not favor assisting the Roman state during the reign of Heraclius and his family!'" = *PG* 90: 112. Cf. Haldon 1985; Neil 2006a.

⁷¹ The identity of Peter should not be confused with Peter, Exarch of Africa. Y. Duval 1971: 210–12.

⁷² Maximus the Confessor, "Relatio": 12–15; 140–1, = *Relatio motionis*, *PG* 90: 112; Neil 2006a: 73–4.

general in Italy) Olympius "because he [Martin] alone overthrew, ruined, and destroyed the entire west."⁷³ By the middle of the 650s imperial officials were speaking as though the empire's situation in the west, which included North Africa, was already betrayed and ruined, even though significant regions still remained outside of the control of Muslims. Even though imperial officials spoke as though dissenters had wrecked the empire in North Africa and in the west in general, the leadership in fact had not completely written off those regions as irrevocably lost. This was a polemical charge on their behalf. Their actions indicated that they still hoped to reverse a gravely imperiled situation.

The trial took place in a civil, and not an ecclesiastical, court in Constantinople with the objective of protecting imperial authority in a time of great political insecurity. The government was trying to cover itself and deflect responsibility and blame to others.⁷⁴ Pope Martin I and Maximus were being made examples to demonstrate the consequences of disobeying imperial authority, especially since Heraclius and Constans II's military failures might be blamed on imperial support for Monoenergism and Monotheletism. Martin may have arrived in Constantinople on September 17, 653 and his trial may have begun around December 20, 653. Maximus' arrest probably occurred about the same time as that of Martin, but his own trial took place in 655.⁷⁵ Of course the charge of betrayal does not mean that Byzantine North Africa was necessarily irrevocably lost. In fact, the imperial Byzantine mint was still functioning at Carthage at that time and for several more decades. North Africa tenuously remained Byzantine. However the hefty impositions of Muslim tribute already meant that Byzantium no longer exercised monopolistic control of North Africa. But arrangements did not involve any condominium of the sort that temporarily existed in seventh-century Cyprus between Muslims and Byzantines.⁷⁶ The imperial accusations against Maximus took account of and responded to an embarrassing situation. The allegation apparently was that Africa was already betrayed to the Saracens or Muslims, even though the Muslims did not yet manage to exercise authority everywhere in North Africa. Pope Theodore allegedly reported to Exarch Gregory a vision of Maximus that Gregory would triumph over the cause of Constans II.

⁷³ Anastasii Bibliothecarii, *Collectanea, Commemoratio eorum quae saeviter et sine Dei respectu acta sunt a veritatis adversaries in sanctum et apostolicum ... Martinum papam Romae*, *PL* 229: 593 "quod solus subvertit et perdidit universum occidentem, et delevit." Caspar 1930-3: II: 563-7.

⁷⁴ Neil 2006a: 73-4. ⁷⁵ Neil 2006a: 75.

⁷⁶ Beihammer 2004: 47-68; Papageorgiou 1986-8.

The process of losing North Africa was already far advanced by 655 in the eyes of Constantinopolitan authorities who were looking for scapegoats in order to divert all responsibility from themselves.

The Byzantine authorities even accused Pope Martin I of collaboration with Muslims.⁷⁷ He fiercely denied such governmental charges: "At no time did I send letters to the Saracens nor, as some say, a statement [*tomus*] as to what they should believe; neither did I ever dispatch money, except only to those servants of God traveling to that place for the sake of alms, and the little which we supplied them was certainly not conveyed to the Saracens."⁷⁸ One can only speculate what supposedly was in a lost *tomus* from Pope Martin concerning what "Saracens" should believe.⁷⁹ Possibly this is a trace of some papal effort to communicate with or find a way to bridge relations with Muslims in an era in which proto-Muslim beliefs and practices were assumed to be in flux and therefore malleable. Possibly some believed that there was no irrevocable gap between Christians and Muslims. But it is unclear whether Martin's alleged relations with "Saracens" involved those in the Levant or those in North Africa or both. The explanation may be more complex. Martin I allegedly engaged in contact of some kind with Muslims and more specifically also engaged in some sort of alleged financial transactions with them. He may in fact have sought to communicate with Christian clergy in areas under Muslim control and also to provide financial aid to such local clerics and to assist Christians in desperate conditions in areas under Muslim control. Other popes tried to accommodate some local practices of other peoples while encouraging conversion.⁸⁰ Even though those activities – the real facts remain unclear – were well-meaning, strictly speaking they could have involved payments or dealing with Muslim authorities. Suspicions about those alleged activities aroused imperial fury. Martin I was unable to convince his imperial accusers to drop their case against him.⁸¹ Martin died in exile in Chersonese Crimea on September 16, 655.

⁷⁷ J. D. Mansi, *Sacrorum conciliorum nova et amplissima collectio* (Florence: 1759–98; repr. Graz: 1960), 10: 850; *Martino I papa (649–653)* 1992.

⁷⁸ Martin I, *Ep. 14, PL 87: 199A (= PL 129: 587C)*. Translation taken from Hoyland 1997: 75. Neil 2006b: 170–1.

⁷⁹ Other popes did attempt to lay out acceptable and unacceptable practices, beliefs, and customs among various ethnic groups. It is possible that while relationships between Christians and Muslims were still in flux Martin I did attempt to draw some boundaries. But no decisive documentation exists.

⁸⁰ Markus 2002; Markus 1970; Neil 2006b: 170–1.

⁸¹ Devreesse 1935; Peeters 1933: 225–62; Neil 2006a: 73–4.

Some Byzantines did understand that there was a very real strategic interrelationship between North Africa and Egypt. In fact, that was a major issue in 655 in the regime's trial of St. Maximus the Confessor at Constantinople. Maximus the Confessor and his colleagues' bitter opposition to imperial Christological policy, and their single-minded focus on it, are understandable in terms of their own Chalcedonian frames of reference.⁸² In the long run their Chalcedonian Christological views did triumph, culminating in the final theological decisions of the Sixth Ecumenical Council at Constantinople. Maximus was a temporary sojourner in Africa, and accordingly he was not concentrating his thoughts or activities on the survival of Romano-Byzantine rule and continuity there.

In fact during the very years when there was the most urgent need for unity and commitment in North Africa, twofold divisiveness, both political and ecclesiastical, rent Byzantine Africa. Maximus the Confessor was accused by imperial officials, among other charges, of declaring openly that he had a dream in which he heard a voice saying that angels in the east and in the west were respectively shouting "Constantine Augustus, may you conquer, and Gregory, may you conquer," and that finally those acclaiming Gregory overcame those of Emperor Constans II (Constantine III),⁸³ indicating in a treasonous way the triumph of the usurping Chalcedonian African Exarch and insurgent "Emperor" Gregory over the Heraclian dynasty's Constans II. Pope Theodore allegedly reported this vision of Maximus to Gregory. The governmental charge of betrayal already was implicitly admitting the loss or virtual loss of North Africa to the Muslims in the mid-650s, even though Byzantine and local resistance would persist there for four more decades. But the finger-pointing had already begun concerning who was responsible for the debacle. The proceedings of the trial of Maximus are a rare source that reflects the contemporary internal polemics. It was not conducive to the creation of an effective Byzantine and North African resistance to the Muslims: individuals were interested in making points rather than solving the problem and developing a coherent and effective defense strategy. The imperial accusations that Maximus encouraged the rebellious cause of Gregory indicate that Gregory's ambition was not merely to create an independent North

⁸² Brandes 2003: 118, argues that Monotheletism had little political or social importance, that it primarily involved ecclesiastical disputes between Rome and Constantinople.

⁸³ *The Life of Maximus the Confessor*, c. 53 (lines 1321-6), pp. 142-5; *Relatio*, PG 90: 112-13; Neil 2006a: 77.

African state without any further ambitions. His rebellion threatened and competed with Emperor Constans II.⁸⁴

Religious fragmentation was a fact in the geographically diverse North Africa of the late seventh century. North African Christians did not welcome the Muslims (or at least no explicit and conclusive testimony exists), but many opposed imperial ecclesiastical policies. Several Monophysite observers, on their part, viewed Muslim successes as divine punishment for the sins of the emperor and his dynasty. Others viewed those successes as divine punishment for the preaching of anti-Monophysite doctrines. Religious acrimony and discord among Christians did weaken Byzantine defenses. There was no unity. Punishment and suffering brought no redemption or stiffening of local military resistance. Whether religious divisions in fact were responsible for Byzantine and Romano-African military failure against the Muslims in North Africa is an unproved hypothesis.

The seventh century was a religious age for Christians as well as Muslims in North Africa. Religion appears to have suffused almost everything – or that is the impression left from what few records have survived. Muslims were not unique in having strong commitments to religion. Religion affected decisions by both adversaries. Religion was an essential component of frames of reference. Those who deny any role to religion in the Muslim conquests in North Africa have not developed a persuasive case.⁸⁵

Muslim apocalyptic expectations were strong late in the seventh century and in the first two decades of the eighth century CE.⁸⁶ Some of these expectations were associated with anticipations of the end-time at the centennial of the appearance of Islam. Most historical analysis of Muslim apocalyptic expectations, however, has concentrated on Muslim assaults against Constantinople and the center of the Byzantine Empire in the east. There is no record of any specific apocalyptic revelations – other than those of Pseudo-Methodius – that were associated with the Muslim conquest of North Africa.⁸⁷

⁸⁴ *Contra* Christides 2000: 41.

⁸⁵ The extreme denial of any religious role whatsoever is that of J. Schumpeter (Bousquet with Schumpeter 1950). He does not make a good case. His is a curiosity. Donner 2005.

⁸⁶ Madelung 1986.

⁸⁷ D. B. Cook 2002a; also D. B. Cook 2002b; Bashear 1991a, repr. in Bonner 2005.

*The military heritage of Heraclius on the
eve of Muslim military operations*

Specters of the troubled past haunted North Africa on the eve of the arrival of the Muslims. One tall specter was that of Emperor Heraclius (reign 610–41), the founder of the reigning imperial dynasty and decisive victor in 628 far to the east in protracted warfare over the fire-worshipping Persians: “seduced, as they say, by the praises of his people, he heaped the honor of victory not on God but on himself, [but] grimly foreseeing no small rebuke [for himself] by means of a vision, he was frequently in terror.” In this fashion an early medieval Spanish chronicle ominously attributes the coming misfortunes of the Byzantine Empire at the hands of Arabs to the excessive arrogance and overweening pride and errors of Heraclius.¹ Other eschatological predictions from several religious traditions and perspectives dogged Heraclius, his immediate family, and his descendants.² The North African context should not be ignored in any consideration of Heraclius. Of course historians wish for more documentation on these problems, but it is indubitable that Heraclius and his successors had more ties with North Africa than did his imperial predecessors during the fourth, fifth, and sixth centuries.³

Late in the seventh century memories of Heraclius’ predecessor Emperor Phocas remained grim and completely negative: “I found no one worse,” a divine voice supposedly proclaimed. Memories of strife between blue and green circus factions remained vivid and negative for monk Anastasius the

¹ *Crónica mozárabe del 754, edición crítica y traducción*, ed. J. E. López Pereira (Zaragoza: 1980) 1: 3–6, pp. 28–9. Trans. from Hoyland 1997: 614–15; *Cont. Isidoriana, Cont. Hisp., MGH AA* 11: 337. A different reading speculates that the chronicler or his source may wish to satirize Islam and Muslim topics.

² Brock 1976. Pseudo-Methodius, *Die syrische Apokalypse des Pseudo-Methodius*, 10.5–6, ed. and trans. G. Reinink, *CSCO* 540–1, SS 220–1 (Leuven: 1993): 39. M. Cook 1992 is interesting but investigates views from the early eighth century, not the seventh. Greenwood 2002; cf. McCormick 2001: 27–8, 62, 115; Magdalino 2006: 33–51.

³ For this issue, see Kaegi forthcoming.

Sinaite and for the author of the *Doctrina Jacobi*. Writing at much distance from North Africa, in the Sinai, Anastasius claimed that “even if the race of the Saracens were to depart from us, straightaway tomorrow the Blues and Greens [rival Byzantine circus factions] would rise up again and the east, and Arabia, and Palestine, and many other lands would bring slaughter upon themselves.”⁴ No precise documentation exists to prove that contemporary Romano-Africans shared Anastasius’ negative memories and sentiments about the historical echoes of events and conditions within the Byzantine Empire earlier in the seventh century, but it is probable that they did.

Heraclius was at war in all but five or six years of his reign of just over thirty years, depending on whether one counts the chaos in the east between early 628 and the Persian evacuation of Syria by Sasānian General Shahrbarāz and the Byzantines’ clash with Muslims at Mu’ta (southern Jordan) in late summer 629 as peace. That makes five-sixths or at least four-fifths of the duration of his reign, and that is assuming that the turbulent and unstable situation of the empire in the Balkans is not considered to be one of war. The unpleasant reality of 80 percent of a reign filled with war and its expenses consumed Heraclius’ attention and his empire’s financial resources. War shaped Heraclius’ reign and those of his dynasty, and the lives of his subjects, however unpleasant that may seem. Warfare brought him to power and dominated his reign in which only a few years experienced the absence of war and its related material, human, and psychological costs.⁵ He did not return to North Africa after he seized Constantinople in 610. Heraclius’ wars set the precedent for his dynastic successors and they are relevant for understanding seventh-century North Africa. It may be more pleasant to dwell on culture, society, and religion, but war formed the environment in which those existed. Heraclius won much prestige from his restoration of what he believed to be the relic of the true cross to Jerusalem on March 31, 630. Probably many North Africans had shared the joy of that triumph but no explicit documentation exists.⁶

⁴ Translation from Haldon 1992: 136, n. 52. Original Greek text: Anastasius Sinaita, *Quaestiones et responsiones*, 65.11–19, and 65.39–43 (ed. M. Richard and J. A. Munitiz, *CC*, ser. Graeca, 59 [Turnhout: 2006]: 116–17); sv. Anastasios Sinaites, no. 269, *PMBZ*, 1: 88–9. Best biographical material: introduction to Anastasius of Sinai, *Hexaemeron*, ed. C. A. Kuehn and J. D. Baggarly (*OCA* 278, Rome: 2007) xiv–xxiii.

⁵ Woods 2006: 99–110.

⁶ Kaegi 2003c: 204–7; Klein 2004: 36–43; Beihammer 2000a: 54–60.

HERACLIUS' FAMILIAL TIES WITH NORTH AFRICA

The relationship of Heraclius to the Muslim conquest of North Africa was complex. He seized power in Constantinople in October 610 starting from North Africa, from Carthage, aided by his father (also named Heraclius) who was Exarch, or what we might define as governor general. Critics are right to express caution, but the larger weight of what scanty evidence we have tends to indicate that Heraclius retained a favorable memory of Africa – hence his reported invocation of the option of returning to Carthage in a moment of despair at Constantinople.⁷ During his approximately ten-year stay in North Africa Heraclius became familiar with the region and its resources. His first wife Fabia (Eudocia), who died in 612, also came from North Africa. She was the daughter of the African Rogas or Rogatus, who served as Prefect of Constantinople at the beginning of Heraclius' reign. Heraclius allegedly even thought of abandoning Constantinople for Carthage back in 619. No other Byzantine emperor had such ties to North Africa. Furthermore, he and his family retained ties with North Africa for decades, especially through his daughter-in-law Gregoria. The precise holdings of immovable property of Heraclius' family within North Africa, including Carthage, are unknown. The family of Heraclius controlled the exarchate of Africa, and the elder Heraclius' brother Gregory was some kind of *hypostrategos* or *magister militum* under the exarch. Heraclius' cousin Nicetas exercised some gubernatorial power as *patrikios* (and exarch?; strictly the title *patrikios* conferred no powers) in North Africa probably in the 610s and 620s but we do not know when it ceased there (perhaps by 629). Only sketchy particulars survive, in part from hagiographic sources.⁸ Panegyrists of Heraclius such as the contemporary poet George of Pisidia celebrate his sailing from North Africa to Constantinople to seize power and overthrow the wrongful usurper Phocas.⁹ The other Eastern Roman or Early Byzantine emperors did not have and did not maintain ties with North Africa that were comparable to those of the Heraclian dynasty.

⁷ Nicephorus, *Short History* 8 (48–9 Mango); Kaegi 2003c: 88–9 for an interpretation.

⁸ Anastasius the Sinaite (Nau) 1902: 83–5; revised later versions in *Synaxarium ecclesiae Constantinopolitanae* (Delehaye): 638–9; and Georgius Monachus, *Chronicon* 678–83. Anastasius was a seventh-century saint, so he recorded this story probably within a few decades of its occurrence.

⁹ George of Pisidia, *Heraclius* 1.218, 2.15 (*Poemi. Panegirici epici*, ed. and trans. A. Pertusi [Etrai: 1959]: 250, 252). Also, on sailing from Africa: *Ioannis Antiocheni Fragmenta ex Historia Chronica*, ed. and trans. U. Roberto (*TU* 154; Berlin: 2005) frg. 321, p. 552. But this frg. consciously deleted from succeeding edn. *Ioannis Antiocheni Fragmenta quae supersunt omnia*, ed. and trans. S. Mariev (Berlin: 2008).

Heraclius' eldest son Heraclius Constantine married his cousin Nicetas' daughter Gregoria, who moved from the Pentapolis, in Cyrenaica, to Constantinople to marry Heraclius Constantine in 629/30. Pentapolis is noteworthy in 629–30. Egypt at that time was in the process of or on the verge of being evacuated by the Persians of the formidable General Shahrbarāz.¹⁰ Nicetas had been administering Africa. Pentapolis was the closest point in Byzantine-controlled Africa to Egypt. The family of Nicetas may have acquired properties in Cyrenaica as a consequence of the earlier military campaigning of Nicetas in 608–10 for the overthrow of Emperor Phocas. Gregoria may simply have been residing there when summoned for her wedding. Nicetas had died recently. She may have visited the Pentapolis to confirm and celebrate the triumphal return of the region to firm and secure imperial control in the wake of the cessation of warfare with the Persians, and in contemplation of the Persian evacuation of Egypt. This would have been part of what marked the wider triumph and zenith of Heraclius' reign after his victory over the Persians in 628 and the peace treaty that he arranged with Shahrbarāz in 629. But she may also have been part of an entourage who waited for the Persian evacuation of Egypt and the ensuing cleanup before moving to Egypt, where, like Byzantine North Africa, her father Nicetas had once administered affairs. It may not have been possible to make an official entry into Alexandria at that time. Because of political and military uncertainties along the Syrian as well as the Egyptian coast, it may not have been practical for Gregoria to sail to Constantinople from Alexandria along the Syrian coast. If she had been residing in Carthage there would have been no reason not to sail to Constantinople directly from Carthage. She had some reason for being present in Cyrenaica in 629/30. No evidence exists whether the Persians ever occupied Cyrenaica between 619 and 629. But Gregoria's journey from Pentapolis to become empress at Constantinople underscored continuing imperial ties with parts of North Africa. Many questions remain open concerning Gregoria and Nicetas and Cyrenaica and North Africa. Gregoria's opinions and emotions concerning North Africa are unknown. But she brought with her the perspectives of her father Nicetas' long experiences in North Africa and Cyrenaica and Egypt.

The perilous military situation in the east after Heraclius' seizure of power at Constantinople totally eliminated the option of any possibility of massive imperial expenditures for public works and the embellishment of North African cities. Heraclius did not have the possibility of doing for

¹⁰ Kaegi and Cobb 2008.

Carthage what Emperor Septimius Severus had once, four hundred years earlier, done for Tripolitanian Leptis Magna. The funds were simply unavailable because of lost provincial tax revenues and the costs of the Persian war and the subsequent devising of a defense against the Muslims.

The family of Heraclius probably received much earlier additional intelligence about North Africa, albeit with a particular perspective, from traditions handed down within the family by the Alexandrian Patriarch John the Almsgiver, who had a ritual brotherhood relationship (*adelphopoiesis*) with Nicetas, the first cousin of Heraclius. This was dated intelligence. John the Almsgiver had died long before any Muslim penetration into Egypt or North Africa, but Patriarchs of Alexandria necessarily received information and had some experience, however distant, of North Africa.¹¹ Such traditions remained within the Heraclian family and were part of their store of memories when they made decisions on African matters. Multiple sources brought multiform intelligence and memories about North Africa to members of the imperial family in the middle of the seventh century.

Anastasius, the disciple of the ascetic theologian Maximus the Confessor, may well have been the notarius of the wife of Nicetas, the first cousin of Heraclius.¹² Maximus' relations with figures at the court of Constans II and with major figures in North Africa owed much to Anastasius and to Anastasius' ties with members of the Heraclian family, whether through Fabia/Eudocia, the wife of Heraclius,¹³ or more likely through the wife of Nicetas, who originated in Africa. At any rate North Africa was a complex context for Maximus the Confessor's experiences and perceptions and confrontations with the family of Heraclius.

Some modern historians have depicted Heraclius as a "Crusader," indeed as the first Crusader, and some early and even more modern crusading historians adopted him as the prototype for future Crusaders.¹⁴ Those images appear to be exaggerations and refer to his activities in the east. In any

¹¹ C. Rapp 2004a.

¹² Boudignon 2004: 31–3.

¹³ Fabia, sv. "Eudocia quae et Fabia (Aelia Flavia)," *PLRE* 3: 457, was the daughter of the prominent African landowner Rogas or Rogatus, who in turn was probably the son of John Rogathinos or Rogatus, the governor of Africa under Justinian I in 562/3 = Rogatus 1, Rogatus 2, *PLRE* 3: 1089. This Rogatus provoked an autochthonous rebellion in early 563 that required the dispatch of Marcianus with troops to suppress. On whom, Modéran 2003a: 664, 666. So the Heraclian family likely had multiple ties with North African elites. Rogatus is the name of a prominent African martyr of the fourth century.

¹⁴ Howard-Johnston 1999: 39–40; the most extreme assertion is by Regan 2001: v–viii. Heraclius is tied to the Crusades by William of Tyre, *Chronicon* 1 1–3, ed. R. B. C. Huygens, *CC*, *Continuatio Mediaevalis* 63–63A, 1: 105–9 (Turnhout: 1986); but Kaegi 2003c: 126.

case, with respect to North Africa, no evocation of Heraclius as Crusader enlivens Byzantine or local resistance, whether Roman or autochthonous, against the Muslims.

CHANGING STRATEGIC CULTURE

Military thinking does not occur in a vacuum. However, the strategic culture in which the Byzantine and North African elites developed decisions about the defense of North Africa against the Muslims lacks good documentation in any language. A useful working definition of the concept of *strategic culture* is that of Johnston:

Strategic culture is an integrated system of symbols (i.e., argumentation structures, languages, analogies, metaphors, etc.) that acts to establish pervasive and long-lasting grand strategic preferences by formulating concepts of the role and efficacy of military in interstate political affairs, and by clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that the strategic preferences seem uniquely realistic and efficacious.

Again according to Johnston: "The fundamental elements of a strategic culture deal with, inter alia, three broad interrelated questions about the role of war in human affairs, the nature of the adversary, and the efficacy of military force and applied violence."¹⁵

Information is imperfect concerning the seventh-century strategic culture for Byzantine decision-making about containing or reversing Muslim penetrations in Syria, upper Mesopotamia, and Anatolia. Long-range Byzantine military thought derived from an old heritage of Hellenistic, Late Roman, and more recent military experiences.¹⁶ Key ingredients were older experiences, the precepts of Maurice's *Strategikon*, and traditions about the advice of Emperor Heraclius. The strategic culture in which plans and ad hoc improvisations emerged for the defense of North Africa emerged from that larger Constantinopolitan Byzantine strategic culture, which was old, tested, and despite deficiencies, not hopeless.¹⁷ That culture overlapped with local North African (Romano-African) elites' own perspectives and experiences and those of autochthonous tribes, although the outcome was no simple harmonious whole. There was no neatly coordinated or smoothly synchronized strategic

¹⁵ Definition: Johnston 1995: 36, 61. This is a modification of an earlier definition by Snyder 1990.

¹⁶ Kaegi 1983. Survey of military manuals, but without analysis of their historical development: Syväntte 2004: 12–26.

¹⁷ A different reading of Byzantine strategic culture and its operational code: Luttwak 2009: 416–18, 422.

culture that was identical in or suited for Constantinople, Carthage, and Constantine. Instead these strategic cultures intersected and overlapped imperfectly. Yet the strategic culture per se did not determine Byzantine strategic choices.

The Byzantine tendency in fighting the Arabs ever since their disaster at the Yarmük (or Jäbiya-Yarmük) in 636 CE in Syria, was, in the east, to rely on walled towns, and to avoid open battle as much as possible, to be wary of ambushes, and especially to be wary of pursuit of seemingly fleeing Arabs.¹⁸ Some modern military historians might characterize Byzantine strategy against Arabs as a Vegetian strategy of exhaustion,¹⁹ conforming to the military advice and wisdom of the Late Roman military author Vegetius, who compiled a military manual in Latin; however the seventh-century Byzantines owed no conscious debt to Vegetius. Yarmük for some military historians terminates one kind of warfare and military thinking and tactics, and demarcates an era in which new ways of war would take form for the future.²⁰ If Byzantine military practices and thinking owed anything to anyone other than Heraclius, it would have been to Emperor Maurice and the precepts in his *Strategikon*, which was compiled around 600. But adherence to a Vegetian strategy was potentially costly to defenders in economic and fiscal terms. No evidence exists on consciousness of Vegetius' precepts in seventh-century North Africa. The policies established by Emperor Heraclius in the east at the end of his life (d. 641) were followed to the extent possible by Byzantine commanders in North Africa. Battle was very risky in terms of lives and scarce material, including financial, resources. The paucity of Byzantine soldiers in North Africa reinforced adherence to that cautious policy.

¹⁸ Nicephorus, *Short History* 23 (68–9 Mango), “not to join battle with the Saracens”; Michael the Syrian, *Chronique* 11.5, 11.7 (ed. and trans. J.-B. Chabot [Paris: 1899–1910; repr. Brussels: 1963] 11: 418, 424–5); “[Theodore, brother of Emperor Heraclius] withdrew from combat to increase and consolidate his forces, at the admonition of his brother [Heraclius],” *Chronicle of 754* c. 9 in *Conquerors and Chroniclers of Early Medieval Spain*, trans. K. B. Wolf (1999): 114. “He commanded them not to fight with them, but to look to their own defence until he should have gathered troops to send to their assistance,” Sebeos, *The Armenian History Attributed to Sebeos*, trans. and annot. R. W. Thomson, hist. comment. J. Howard-Johnston (Liverpool: 1999): 42, Hist. Comment. 97. “Anonymous Byzantine Treatise on Strategy,” c. 40, in *Three Byzantine Military Treatises*, ed. G. T. Dennis (Washington, DC: 1985): 118–19, warns of Arab ambushes, but it belongs not in the sixth but rather in the ninth century or elsewhere in the Middle Byzantine Period. See Pryor and Jeffreys 2006: 178, n. 16; not earlier than 790: Rance 2007.

¹⁹ Exchange of views on primarily western medieval practices of warfare and the issue of Vegetian warfare: Rogers 2002: 1–19; Morillo 2002: 24. But see Gillingham 2004: 149–58. All of these ignore the *Strategikon*, because it is not directly relevant to the cultural heritage of western medieval authors and commanders.

²⁰ Syv anne 2004 terminates his military history with Yarmük but does not explain why that battle marks a turning point, even though on p. 432 he judges it to be decisive.

But at times, even if pursuing a Vegetian-style strategy, it was necessary to resort to open combat.²¹

Estimates of the number of Byzantine troops in seventh-century North Africa are merely guesses.²² Reliable figures do not exist. No pay-roll musters survive from that era. Probably the total numbers of troops in North Africa 641 at the death of Heraclius were modest. Estimates of the total size of the Byzantine military forces within the entire empire in the middle of the seventh century, in the wake of great territorial and revenue losses, vary from a high of 100,000 to 80,000 or considerably less (perhaps half of the highest estimate, and therefore maybe around 50,000), but conclusive documented proof of numbers does not exist at this time.²³ Muslim sources attribute fancifully high numbers to Byzantine armies, which are surely false. Their own sources probably did not have sound figures, and these high ones exist to accentuate and inflate the Muslim triumphs. On the other hand, Muslim armies in themselves were not massive. Operations did not involve huge armies or large massed battles. Accurate statistics do not exist about the exact size of the Byzantine garrison in North Africa, or about how many local males could be recruited to expand its size. Some have hypothesized an army of 15,000 to 20,000 troops, which seems high. Nor is there information about the sources of their financing. There were very difficult challenges in attempting to provide logistical support, in particular food, for military forces larger than 6,000 soldiers. Some military experts warn that it would have been impossible to provision more than 10,000 to 15,000 soldiers even where there was adequate water.²⁴ But there is no local tradition of the populace arming itself here any more than there had been one in Egypt or Syria. That was inconsistent with Late Roman practice. At least as difficult is estimating numbers of autochthonous combatants. Even Muslim sources admit their ignorance of autochthonous numbers.

²¹ Lee 2005: 122–3.

²² On problems of estimating numbers: Benabbès 2004: 180–1. Howard-Johnston 2004: 101 estimated that Heraclius commanded about 15,000 soldiers in his invasion of Persia in 627.

²³ Zuckerman 2005: 105–6, for critical discussion of estimates and for a severely reduced figure for total size of the empire's military personnel at mid-seventh century. Also for modest numbers in field armies: Zuckerman 2004: 168; also Halsall 2003: 119–33. But broad arguments for higher numbers of soldiers in various premodern historical periods: Bachrach 1999 as well as Syväne 2004: 70–2, 91, 423–4. But much of Syväne's reasoning on size of armies lacks confirmation. He starts with a preference for higher numbers and ends by agreeing with himself. I believe numbers were usually modest.

²⁴ General Edouard Bremond 1942.

ROTATION OF MILITARY OFFICERS BETWEEN
NORTH AFRICA AND THE EAST

The Heraclian family had its roots and drew part of its strength from participating in and understanding transfers between eastern and African tours of duty, together with the webs of ties that developed from becoming acquainted with personnel, terrain, and subjects in two different regions of stressful borders and warfare. These were fundamental components of the strategic culture that existed on the eve of and during the initial years of Muslim military operations in North Africa. Mid-seventh-century decision-makers in Constantinople probably continued to think about policies and selections of key personnel for Africa in the light of time-honored habits and patterns of actions. However those patterns of shifting and transferring the latest military innovations and adapting the latest lessons from the eastern frontier (in Syria and upper Mesopotamia) to North Africa were coming to an end for the Byzantines and North Africans. They were other components of the heritage of Heraclius. But unlike the situation in the previous decades that had passed since the Byzantine reconquest of North Africa from the Vandals, now the Muslims, the foe on Byzantium's eastern frontier, extended their reach to North Africa. Now they were shifting some of their key Muslim commanders (Busr b. Abi Arṭāt, 'Abd al-Malik b. Marwān, Faḍāla b. 'Ubayd) with extensive experience or motivation in fighting the Byzantines in the east and Egypt and applying the latest Muslim tactical innovations and diplomatic skills from those newly-won territories and frontiers to the overcoming of Byzantine resistance in Africa. These Muslim commanders strove for victories but probably also to enhance their reputations and wealth. Later Muslim traditions awarded fame to competing commanders. Sometimes these attributions of fame were inconsistent and even contradictory. This was a complex process of secular change with great significance and commensurate consequences. It altered the dynamics of the struggle. Historical memory of these events and the striving Muslim personalities is mixed.

The process of the formation of attitudes about military deployments and tactical reactions and the rudiments of larger strategy were complex and remain opaque and discouraging for modern investigators. But some remarks are worthwhile. Major Byzantine military appointments and strategy in North Africa had followed a pattern since the commencement of the Byzantine reconquest of North Africa in the 530s. Emperors often selected commanders of proven military leadership from the corps of officers who were available in the east, namely those who had developed

experience against Persia in the tough proving grounds of the military zone of north Syria and upper Mesopotamia. That was the case in the sixth century with Belisarius, with the eunuch Solomon (who hailed from, as presumably did his nephew Sergius, the region of Dara in the plains of northern Syria or upper Mesopotamia),²⁵ and with John Troglita, and at the beginning of the seventh century with the elder Heraclius, the father of Emperor Heraclius. Each brought with him to North Africa the latest experience, tactics, and military wisdom from military campaigns against the Persians. This was a point of pride. According to Procopius this experience from fighting the Persians was an asset to Byzantine military effectiveness in sixth-century North Africa, and presumably it was thought to continue to be so in the seventh century.²⁶ Some of the challenges of terrain, water, logistics, fortifications, and weather in both theaters were comparable although not identical. Reinforcing this stream of appointees with experience in upper Mesopotamia would be significant numbers of officers and soldiers from Armenia, some of whom had also served in the upper Mesopotamian frontier zone. This was a heritage from Justinian I as well as from Heraclius.²⁷

However by the 640s and 650s there was no longer any untapped pool of talented and victorious Byzantine commanders for the government to switch from north Syria and upper Mesopotamia or southeastern Anatolia to North Africa. The older imperial adversary, the Sasānian Persian Empire, had disappeared, fallen to Muslim victors. The Byzantine Empire had lost the old familiar training and testing ground of upper Mesopotamia to the Muslims. The Byzantine Empire's leadership was still desperately searching for some winning military formula against the Muslims. There probably continued to be an exchange of information about effective methods and tactics between the empire's receding eastern frontier and North Africa and Numidia, but no documentation exists.

Something had changed in the east, which had implications for staffing the Byzantine army in North Africa. The supply of winning Byzantine military talent had dried up and old patterns for army careers and advancement and for absorption and dissemination and distribution of military wisdom broke down in the unprecedented empire-wide military crisis of the middle of the seventh century. But this was still a time of confusion, regrouping, and searching. Military commanders in North Africa cannot

²⁵ Procopius, *Wars* 3.11.9. ²⁶ Procopius, *Wars* 3.19-7; Conant 2004: 267-9.

²⁷ Isaac 1990/1992: 249-64. Dillemann 1962.

have found much encouraging inspiration from the Byzantine army's record in the east between 630 and 647 or 665.

The rotation of Byzantine military officers between North Africa and the east after the Justinianic reconquest of Africa accomplished some transfer of experiences and knowledge. These sectors were not hermetically sealed off. The challenge is how to assess this pattern or process in the face of minimal information in the sources. We cannot easily weigh the perspectives, consciousness, and change due to shifting of commanders between regions. Similar considerations apply to the shifting of Muslim commanders between the edge of Anatolia and Syria and Africa, but it is inappropriate to examine them here. Much earlier in Roman imperial history the Legio III Cyrenaica had been stationed in the province of Arabia while some soldiers from Syria had been shifted to North Africa.²⁸ Byzantine military commanders normally did not originate in Africa but were rotated in and out, often from eastern frontier regions.

The ethnic composition of the army in North Africa is undocumented but it was not a homogeneous mass. It is likely that military ranks included some Greeks and Armenians from the east as well as descendants of Roman veterans who had intermarried with autochthonous populations. Armenians held many prominent posts in the Byzantine armies throughout the empire, including Palestine and Syria, during the Heraclian dynasty, and had been prominent in North Africa since the Byzantine reconquests in the 550s. Some, such as John dux of Tigisis in 641, retained and even proclaimed their Armenian consciousness. Some, like the future Heraclius, intermarried with African elites. What the Latin elites of North Africa and autochthonous populations of Africa thought of the Armenian presence in their midst is unknown. How well Armenian military officers adjusted to condition in Africa and Numidia is equally unclear.

The Heraclian dynastic policy of appointing Armenians to prominent posts in North Africa continued at least into the middle of the seventh century: the example of Narseh at Tripoli stands out. The imperial government also continued to exile undesirable or dangerous Armenians to North Africa and to nearby islands. So the Byzantine presence in Africa had a strong Armenian stamp, not merely a Roman or Greek one. Historians may ponder how Armenian commanders in North Africa reacted to the news that Muslims were overrunning much of their Armenian homeland at the end of the 630s and beginning of the 640s, but the sources are silent. Armenians in North Africa cannot have received such news with

²⁸ Ritterling, sv. "Legio," *RE* 12: 144–1501, 1508–13. Le Bohec 2007: 453–64 = *Karthago* 21: 81–92.

equanimity, although it could have stiffened the determination of some to fight on in North Africa while others may have transferred back east to help defend their homelands and villages or to help their families adjust. The autochthonous populations (and by autochthonous one means assimilated descendants of autochthonous peoples, but it is futile to speculate about the alleged purity of descent of soldiers) probably increased in the ranks of Byzantine forces in North Africa with the passage of time.

Emperor Heraclius bequeathed no successful system of tactics for containing or pushing back the Muslims in the rolling plains of north Syria and upper Mesopotamia when he died in early 641. Instead his commanders had, sometimes in accordance with and sometimes against his instructions, evacuated key strategic points in those regions without major battles and campaigns. They had successfully withdrawn their shattered and disheartened forces to the edges of the Taurus Mountains in Anatolia. They had tried unsuccessfully to develop viable coalitions with Christian Arab tribes in those regions. Their negative experiences associated with the withdrawal and regrouping offered no wisdom about the conduct of warfare and mobile maneuvering to those commanders in North Africa who had the responsibility for devising defenses for southern Byzacium or Numidia. By the late 640s any Byzantine commanders who had served in northern Mesopotamia or northern Syria had become familiar only with catastrophic defeats such as Yarmūk and repeated substantial and very depressing pullbacks or pullouts, not with any effective ways for waging elastic mobile warfare or for combating Muslim raiders – except for the importance of taking advantage of whatever fortified towns and rough terrain and mountain passes were available.²⁹

Byzantine upper Mesopotamia and north Syria were no more. Innovations and helpful lessons were seldom coming anymore from the east to enliven Byzantine defenses in North Africa. Experiences and perspectives from any Byzantine commanders or officials who had participated in the defense of or fled from Byzantine Egypt offered no encouragement or visions for military innovations and successful coping or institutional creativity. In time the Byzantines would develop effective strategies of containment of the Muslims in Anatolia, but that process of adaptation was a slow one. Military officers with that kind of effective experience were not, it seems, continuing to be transferred to North Africa to apply any innovations that Byzantines were developing in Anatolia. The time nevertheless had come to cease trading land for time for Byzantine

²⁹ Kaegi 1995: 147–80, 246–87.

forces to regroup and to rethink in North Africa. One could not abandon everything in North Africa without decisive combat, and that moment was approaching.

Regional transfers involved other complications. Although the Byzantine texts do not mention it, local Numidian elites and soldiers may have had a motive other than injunctions from St. Maximus the Confessor in refusing to move from Numidia to Egypt to fight Arabs in 633. Like the Byzantine army in Egypt itself, Numidian units may have become too embedded in their own localities.³⁰ Local elites and soldiers may have been reluctant to move far away to unfamiliar and risky localities, and perhaps even more important, they may have feared leaving Numidia and Zeugitana/Africa Proconsularis and Byzacena vulnerable to various tribal raids and plundering during what could turn out to be their indefinite absence on campaign in Egypt or other vague points to the east. Their refusal to move was in itself an assertion of *de facto* autonomy and a readiness to risk imperial wrath for the sake of local interests and points of view. They may have feared that they might be permanently transferred. It was not easy for the imperial government to retaliate against stubborn soldiers at a time of great vulnerability, even though Heraclius had recently won great victories and prestige from his triumph over the Persians and from his restoration of what he believed was the True Cross to Jerusalem (March 630). The sixth-century historian Procopius reports that Byzantine troops already in the reign of Justinian had disliked being shifted between the North African and eastern fronts.³¹ Soldiers' opposition to being moved was old and not always connected with any religious issues. Soldiers had become attached to Numidian localities by the seventh century. Rivalries between Byzantine commanders in Numidia and Byzacena had resulted in Byzantine military reverses at the hands of autochthonous tribes back in 545,³² so Numidian forces had not always had a smooth working relationship with other Byzantine forces in North Africa.

Heraclius, as a rebel, had himself once sent expeditionary forces from Zeugitana/Africa Proconsularis and Tripolitania to wrest control of Egypt successfully from Emperor Phocas some decades earlier, in 608–10.³³ Heraclius knew how to exploit land routes between Africa Proconsularis and Egypt, and conversely, he knew that hostile forces from Egypt could imperil Roman North Africa. His faction's struggle against Phocas in Egypt lasted longer, as we know from a recently deciphered and published

³⁰ On Egypt: Palme 2009. ³¹ Procopius, *Wars* 3.10.5. Kaegi 1981a: 137.

³² Procopius, *Wars* 4.25.1–28, 4.27.5–38, 4.28.1–35. ³³ Kaegi 2003c: 37–49.

papyrus, than hitherto assumed. Parts of Upper Egypt remained in the hands of partisans of Phocas at least into January 610.³⁴ But no reliable information exists about how Heraclius advised his sons and his second wife Martina and respective advisers about how to handle any military options and threats. Martina, unlike Heraclius' first wife Fabia/Eudocia, had no ties with North Africa, but she managed to reign after Heraclius' death (February 11, 641) for only several months before insurgents under General Valentine (Valentinos) violently removed and mutilated her and her son Heraclonas.³⁵ This put control of decision-making in Constantinople again into the hands of those with some favorable sentiments toward Byzantine North Africa and the maintenance of dynastic ties with Africa as well as into the hands of those very elements who favored a strong imperial, that is military, resistance, to the Muslim advances.

BYZANTINE RAIDS, FORTIFICATIONS, AND RESISTANCE

The Byzantines constructed North African fortifications that actually functioned well for the security of their interests and their subjects in the sixth and early seventh centuries.³⁶ Those fortifications served their original purposes: containment of autochthonous raiders and a temporary place of refuge from short-term raiders. But they were not constructed or sited for any strategy of containment or rollback of hitherto inconceivable and repeated major land penetrations in depth by mobile invaders from the east.

Literary sources, such as the *Wars* and *Buildings* (*De aedificiis*) of historian Procopius of Caesarea (Palestine), and extensive archaeological remains testify that the Byzantines had fortified the North Africa that they reconquered from the Vandals primarily in their view to protect themselves and their civilian subjects from raids by autochthonous tribes. Most of these fortifications were roughly and hastily constructed by reusing *spolia*, especially older salvaged stones from Roman buildings. Strategically located cities on crossroads such as Tebessa possessed massive fortifications as well as vast basilicas. It is uncertain which historical

³⁴ Papyrus 27 = P. Vindob. G 21350, January 8, 610, Arsinoe, *Corpus Papyrorum Raineri*, vol. xxiv, *Griechische Texte*, xvii. *Dokumente zu Verwaltung und Militär aus dem spätantiken Ägypten*, ed. B. Palme, Vienna (2002): 160–5. See J. R. Rea, *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri* LVIII, pp. 51–2, p. 87.

³⁵ Sebeos, *Hist.*, c. 142–3 (Thomson and Howard-Johnston I: 106–7, II: 253–4); Kaegi 1981a, 154–8; Misiu 1985. Sv. "Valentinus 5," *PLRE* 3: 1354–5; sv. "Valentinos" no. 8545, *PMBZ* 5: 69–74.

³⁶ As North African field survey specialist B. Hitchner aptly remarked in direct communications to me.

precedents and lessons were available for the Byzantines to study from the successful Heraclian campaigns of 608–10 in Africa, Cyrenaica, and Egypt against Phocas, and from measures for keeping Africa secure from the Persians between 619 and 628 (during the Persian occupation of Egypt), or from Vandal–Byzantine frontier-making and sparring between 430 and 533.

The dimensions of Byzantine fortifications in North Africa are small.¹⁷ The small fortresses and towers cannot have housed large numbers of troops. It is difficult to imagine how the imperial government could expect to control the autochthonous tribes in the region of the Aures Mountains or in the Tunisian Dorsal with such small numbers of troops, let alone conceive and implement effective resistance against the Muslims. Instead they depended on cooperation from local North African populations. These Byzantine fixed fortifications were rapidly erected¹⁸ and much smaller than earlier Roman ones and probably did not appear to be as formidable to locals as earlier Roman fortifications.

The modest size of Byzantine garrisons, without any new technical innovations to multiply their military effectiveness, required the Byzantines either to avoid harsh internal policies or to avoid trying to control or defend their authority in those regions or to try to negotiate or devise policies that conciliated and won the support and confidence of local populations, including autochthonous leaderships. The provinces of Africa (*Zeugitana*) and Numidia were thinly garrisoned. The imperial government could not afford to send large numbers of soldiers from the imperiled east or from the Balkans or Italy, where there were other very pressing problems. Any meaningful defense in North Africa against a major external threat depended on developing the potential for local resources for self-defense. Local defense against local raiders required less substantial strategic and material defenses than against large-scale extraneous foes. Only limited assistance could come from Constantinople. Byzantine military control appears to have been tenuous on the eve of the Muslim expeditions. So the situation was a vulnerable one. The Byzantines maintained control reasonably well for almost two centuries and managed to put down local rebellions, but the Byzantine military were entirely inadequate to the task of holding North Africa against a major invasion from the east and their leadership lacked any effective strategy or adequate resources for strengthening their defenses. Overtures to and an integration of autochthonous

¹⁷ Pringle 1981. ¹⁸ Much reuse of earlier masonry.

manpower and counsel were essential. Probably the Muslim leadership perceived that and resolved to take advantage of that vulnerable situation.

No secure archaeological or epigraphical evidence exists for the creation of major new Byzantine fortifications in seventh-century North Africa. But one inscription commemorates the fortification of a Byzantine fort at Henchir el Ksour, two kilometers west of Tebessa sometime between 612 and 641.³⁹ The fortifications that exist appear to have their origins in the sixth century, primarily under Solomon, *magister militum* for Africa, in the reign of Justinian I. The late sixth-century Byzantine general John Troglita had reportedly counseled: "It is appropriate now to defend oneself as quickly as possible with normal security measures and to restore pleasant conditions. Hasten to take your units back to their respective posts. Fortify villages, surround the high mountains, grottos, forests, rivers, the rock outcroppings of the forests and enclose the gorges. Then with great care close the jaws of your trap."⁴⁰ That probably was the government's advice to its North African subjects in the seventh century as well. It is a reasonable summary of Byzantine military practices and strategy in North African rough terrain. The strategy was designed to protect key towns and communications, which it accomplished.

STATUS OF BYZANTINE DEFENSES
IN SOUTHERN TUNISIA 641-7

The desperate and deteriorating military situation in the east during the reign of Heraclius, both due to the Persian and to the early Islamic invasions, received priority in Constantinople. But that prioritization may have caused North Africans to regard themselves and their interests as neglected with respect to imperial political, military, and fiscal policies. The Heraclian dynasty's advocacy of a Christological policy of Monotheletism exacerbated North African grievances. It was very inopportune to attempt whatever autarkic policy Gregory tried to implement.

³⁹ *CIL* 10681, 10682, 16727 = *ILAlg.* 1, 3597. See Durliat 1981a: no. IV; Pringle 1981: 330-1, no. 37.

⁴⁰ Corippus, *Iohannidos*, 6, 38-43 (Diggle and Goodyear): 114. "nunc Libycos fines solito custode tueri. accelerare placet, felicia regna referre. ocius in proprias numerosque reducite sedes et munite locos. celsos indagine montes, antra, nemus, fluuios, siluarum saxa, latebras cingite et obsessas cauti concludite fauces." Trans. G. W. Shea, *The Iohannis or De Bellis Libycis of Flavius Cresconius Corippus* (Lewiston, NY: 1998): 147: "I have decided to move quickly, to protect the Libyan lands with the customary garrison and thus to restore our happy rule. Lead your troops back to their proper stations with haste and fortify your positions. Circle the lofty mountains with your net, the caves, the groves, the streams and cliffs in the forests and their hidden recesses. Then, ever so carefully, close the jaws of your trap."

By conquering lightly populated Tripolitania⁴¹ the Muslims not only gained more booty, territory, and tribute, but they also created a vast territorial buffer between the Byzantines in Africa and Egypt which was extremely rich and populous and which the Muslims had just conquered and over which they were consolidating their control. That new buffer of Muslim-controlled territory also made it more difficult for Egyptians and others to flee from Muslim control, that is, it became much more difficult for any discontents to flee overland from Egypt to Africa or even to take small boats along the Libyan coast. Babylon or Fuṣṭāṭ (Old Cairo) lies some 2,100 kilometers by air to the east of Carthage, and a far greater distance if following the old Roman coastal road system. But now Muslims had placed themselves close to the southern edges of the province of Byzacium (Byzacena), interposing themselves near what is now southern Tunisia.

It was desirable in principle, from a Byzantine perspective, for the Byzantines to stop the Muslims in North Africa in the southern littoral in the vicinity of the Mediterranean port of Gabes (Tacapae) but their resources were insufficient. There is much valuable land that is too exposed, without natural defensible barriers along the coast between Gabes and Sousse (Hadrumentum).⁴² No evidence exists for significant Byzantine military defenses – forts, towers, or trenches – being erected in extreme southern Tunisia, near what would today be the Tuniso-Libyan border, in anticipation of any Muslim invasion.⁴³ That contrasts, for example, with the creation of the so-called “Mareth Line” by the French, and occupied by the Germans, including General Rommel, in the 1930s and during World War II.⁴⁴ No evidence exists for such Byzantine defensive activity, no matter how rational it might seem to modern strategists.⁴⁵ That region was lightly settled in the Byzantine era, and as General Montgomery managed in World War II, it would have been possible for bedouin to outflank or turn any line near or extending to the coast by passing through the desert beyond the Matmata Hills. The important island of Jirba was still controlled by the Byzantines and had an economic role – trade, ceramics, probably handicrafts – but at that time its fortification and garrisoning, if any, are unknown.⁴⁶

⁴¹ Christides 2000: 38–9. ⁴² Al-Bakrī, *Masālik* II: 665–70; al-Nuwayrī, *Nihāya* xxiv: 11.

⁴³ Mrabet 1996, 133–42.

⁴⁴ Daillier 1985; cf. Diehl 1896, 231, 235, 303, 374. Of course twentieth-century warfare involved different defenses.

⁴⁵ On this region, see Troussset 1974.

⁴⁶ Fentress and Fontana 2009: 198–200, Fontana *et al.* 2009: 208–10.

Apprehension about Muslim gains as well as hostility to imperial theological policies may have encouraged Gregory and local North African elites to revolt.⁴⁷ The problem was that there were insufficient means and tools in North Africa for the inhabitants to find the resources by themselves to resist the Muslims. Cooperation with Constantinople was essential simply to receive reasonably accurate information and assessments about broader Muslim operations, intentions, and capability and to try to fit that data into some broader frame of reference. Byzantine naval assistance could be very helpful, but alone it could not do the job of halting or rolling back the Muslims.

Between 642 and 670, the Muslims consolidated their control of Tripolitania and converted and incorporated some of its autochthonous tribes into their numbers. That process is poorly documented and poorly understood. This was a kind of apprenticeship for the subsequent real subjugation of the provinces of Byzacena and Zeugitana/Africa Proconsularis and Numidia.⁴⁸ But the initial and provisional seizure of Tripolitania by the Muslims, which they completed at least with respect to the Mediterranean coastline by 643, gave them the opportunity to observe, to listen, and to learn about the opportunities and risks of undertaking any invasion of Byzantine North Africa. They had established a good forward observation post and excellent base for future operations.⁴⁹ One hypothesis argues that the Muslims succeeded in winning the support of Monophysitic constituencies in Cyrenaica, but the documentation is imperfect.⁵⁰ A reference by al-Mālikī to a Coptic adviser to the Muslim commander 'Abd Allāh ibn Abī Sarḥ in 647 may support this hypothesis, but this is a late source.⁵¹ Late sources tend to exaggerate Coptic collaboration while contemporary sources do not mention it.⁵²

The highly competent, resourceful, and intelligent Muslim conqueror of Egypt 'Amr b. al-'Āṣ⁵³ was able to push his forces ahead very rapidly from recently subjugated Egypt. He probably decided to do this on his own initiative and responsibility. They managed to reach Tripolitania,

⁴⁷ Ibn 'Abd al-Ḥakam (Torrey): 183–4.

⁴⁸ Modéran 2003a: 798.

⁴⁹ Ibn 'Abd al-Ḥakam (Torrey): 171–3; Gateau 1948: 37–41.

⁵⁰ Goodchild 1967: 115–24 has propounded the theory.

⁵¹ Abū Bakr 'Abd Allāh b. Muḥammad, Al-Mālikī, *Kitāb Riyāḍ al-nufūs*, ed. B. al-Bakkūsh, rev. M. al-'Arūsī al-Matwī. (Beirut: 1981–4), 17.

⁵² So observes Palme 2009. "Political identity versus religious distinction? The case of Egypt in the Later Roman Empire," International Congress Visions of Community, Vienna, June 2009.

⁵³ Wensinck, sv. "Amr b. al-'Āṣ," *EI*² 1: 451–2.

where they captured Tripoli and Leptis Magna by 643.⁵⁴ 'Amr's previous expedition in 642 into Cyrenaica (Pentapolis) as far as Barqa (al-Marj) compelled its inhabitants to pay a substantial tribute before he withdrew. Barqa fell between November/December 642 and March 644.⁵⁵ One Byzantine commander named Apollonius (?) withdrew with his troops behind the walls of the Cyrenaican port of Teuchira (Tokra).⁵⁶ Details are lacking. Controversies swirl around the date and authenticity of traditions that the local tribe of Lawāta in the region of Barqa had tax levied on them by Muslims that they might acquit by selling some of their children.⁵⁷ By that very stroke of occupying coastal areas of Cyrenaica and Tripolitania the Muslims cut off the possibility of flight by land for any malcontents in Egypt. The Muslims of 'Amr had thereby placed themselves on the edge of Byzantine-controlled North Africa. At Tripoli they were approximately 500 kilometers from Carthage. They may have been aware that already twice, in 608–9 and again in 632/3, a Byzantine expeditionary attack from a North African base had threatened to alter the military and political situation in Egypt. In 645–6, another unsuccessful Byzantine naval effort to reassert control over parts of Egypt underscored the still somewhat precarious Muslim hold on Egypt. Risk remained for the Muslims as long as the Byzantines remained in North Africa and continued to collect fat tax revenues from that region.

No significant Byzantine mobile army or forces withdrew from Muslim-overrun Egypt by land westward along the Libyan coast to the westernmost section of Tripolitania or to the extreme southernmost coastline of modern Tunisia. One cannot conceive of the North African military situation in the 640s CE as comparable to that of 1300 years later, namely, the German withdrawal in 1942 from western Egypt after their loss at the battle of El Alamein. In principle there were potential defensive points along the lengthy stretch of land from Tobruk to Tripoli, such as Wadi Halfaya Pass, Awjila, and Buerat. There in theory one might have tried to fortify and make a stand. But there were insufficient Byzantine forces to be able

⁵⁴ Ibn 'Abd al-Hakam (Torrey): 171–2. Leptis: Khalifa b. Khayyāt al-'Uṣfurī, *Ta'rikkh*, ed. M. N. Fawwāz and H. Kishli (Beirut: 1995) 1995: 86. Between February/March 643 and May/June 644: Thiry 1995: 59–60.

⁵⁵ Khalifa b. Khayyāt, *Ta'rikkh*: 80. Al-Balādhurī, *Futūḥ* 224. Elias of Nisibis, *Opus Chronologicum*, ed. E. W. Brooks, trans. J.-B. Chabot. *CSCO SS*, 62–3, ser. 3, Tome 8. Textus, Versio (Paris: 1910), 84; Ibn al-Athīr, 'Izz al-Dīn, *al-Kāmil fī al-tarikh*, ed. C.J. Tornberg, 13 vols. repr. with changed pagination (Beirut: 1965): 111: 89. Thiry 1995: 22–36.

⁵⁶ John of Nikiu, *Chron.* 120.34 (*The Chronicle of John, Bishop of Nikiu*, trans. R. H. Charles [Oxford: 1916] 195) = *Chronique de Jean évêque de Nikou*, trans. H. Zotenberg (Paris: 1883): 458. Discussion in Benabèbs 2004: 192–6; Goodchild 1967: 116–18.

⁵⁷ Thiry 1995: 30–5.

to constitute an elastic mobile defensive force to take advantage of topographical options. The local population in Cyrenaica and Tripolitania or on their coasts was in no condition to undertake any protracted serious defense of its own. Any fixed defensive positions risked being turned by invaders' flanking movements away from the coast. Historical analogies always involve risk, but the desert campaigns of 1941-2 illuminate counterfactual scenarios of possible defenses against an invader from the east.¹⁸ But the construction of any such defense was wholly unrealistic with the inadequate Byzantine forces and logistical support in the early and middle seventh century.

No coherent withdrawal of Byzantine land forces or the formation of any mobile screening defensive force along the Libyan coast or to the vicinity of Mareth or Gigthis in what is now southern Tunisia took place in the late 630s or early 640s, at least none that is documented in extant primary sources. This is important to understand as one tries to envisage the challenge to the Byzantine and local authorities who had the responsibility of creating a military defense against Muslim forces whose center of command and control, and sources of manpower lay in Muslim-occupied Egypt. Probably Byzantine civil and military authorities in Byzantine Africa in effect depended on reports from local ship crews and possibly couriers or informal news from inhabitants from outposts or areas closest to the advance units of Muslims. They did not construct any coherent defensive line on land, as far as known, to watch for and resist hostile forces advancing from the east. There is no information about Byzantine resort to local farmers or tribes or nomads for information about Muslim military movements or stockpiling of supplies. There is likewise no information about the creation or activation of any *limitanei* or home guard among local inhabitants along the lightly populated southern Tunisian coast. Even more obscure is the situation in remote back country away from the Cyrenaican and Tripolitanian coasts.

Seventh-century defenders of North Africa had no textbook instructions on how earlier defenses of Roman and Late Roman Africa had functioned. The important Maurice's *Strategikon* (military manual, in Greek) from c. 600 CE offered no special military wisdom on how to fight Arabs or how to defend North Africa.¹⁹ Earlier Roman defenses against

¹⁸ Playfair and Morony 1966: 217-34; Porch 2004: 401-5.

¹⁹ Maurice's *Strategikon*, *Handbook of Byzantine Military Strategy*, trans. G. T. Dennis (Philadelphia 1984), except for the African drill or exercise, in 63, on which see below pp. 136-9. Also: Rance 1994, 27-42, 81-102, 172-4. Author: Emperor Maurice (r. 582-602), Rance, "Battle," *CHGRW* 347-8. Zuckerman 2004: 165. On improperly ascribed sections: Greatrex, Elton, and Burgess 2005.

autochthonous tribes were probably only poorly remembered or understood and were not necessarily relevant for the realities of seventh-century conditions. The Vandals for their part had failed to create any worthwhile military precedents to follow for defending those exposed areas.

No information exists on Byzantine defenses in North Africa during the Persian occupation of Egypt, but probably the Persians had reached their westernmost logistical limits in the years 619–29. Consciousness of that Persian precedent might have lulled North Africans. The Muslims surmounted logistical challenges from the east that the Persians in Egypt failed to do. The Muslims did not limit their advance to the coastal roads. But no good defensive models or historical inspiration existed for the defenders of Byzantine North Africa. Constantinopolitans were probably not well informed on the local situation in Africa. North African Romans had failed to devise a successful resistance against the Vandals, who overran Africa from the west, in the early fifth century. Vandal resistance to the Byzantines in turn crumbled rapidly in the sixth century. Precedents were not encouraging, even though many resources were potentially available.

The modest numbers of Muslims for their part needed time to regroup after overrunning Cyrenaica and Tripolitania in 643 CE (approximately) before undertaking the major task of reducing the regions of Byzacium and Africa and Numidia. They needed a pause for assembling provisions, mounts, and manpower as well as time to acquire useful intelligence about Byzantine capabilities for defense and offense and about the ability of the local inhabitants to develop their own defenses and recruitment. Distances were formidable.

Muslims very likely heard of the failed imperial plan of Heraclius to move Byzantine troops from Numidia in 633 to help beleaguered Egypt and may have wished to forestall any repetition or improved version of such an effort. It was from Africa, now called Ifrīqiya (Tunisia), that, in future centuries, the Fāṭimids would conquer Egypt. So there were a number of incentives for the Muslims in conquering North Africa and ejecting the Byzantines from it.⁶⁰ The abortive raid by the Byzantine eunuch Manuel in 646 against Alexandria may have threatened to delay Muslim expeditions against North Africa, although his action may have stimulated Muslim authorities in Egypt to do something decisive against remaining Byzantine military and political threats, such as those in Africa to the west of Egypt.

⁶⁰ Context: Wellhausen 1901. Solid annotated Eng. trans. in Bonner 2005: 31–64.

APPREHENSIONS

The Chalcedonian ascetic leader Maximus the Confessor, who was exiled in North Africa, was aware of the Muslim conquests in the east and deplored them. In a letter to General Peter, he stated:

What is more upsetting than the evils now taking hold of the world? What is more dreadful than what has happened? What is more fearful or fearful to those suffering it than to see a desert-inhabiting and barbarian people overrun another land as though it were its own. And see these rough and wild beasts who have only the thinnest surface with a human form outside overrun this sophisticated and luxuriant state?

... it announces the coming of the Anti-Christ, because they truly do not know the Saviour. It signifies the bad and the lawless, hating men and hating God, because they are haters of mankind and haters of God, and because they inveigh against the saints ...

What is more monstrous to the eyes and ears of Christians? Because you see this rough and uncouth people born to license raising up its hand against God's inheritance. But this mass of things has happened because of our sins.⁶¹

This is one of the rare early texts from Africa in the years that the Muslim conquests were under way. It was probably written in the 630s, perhaps in 633-4.⁶² It is the first of several judgments by prominent ecclesiastics that the Muslim incursions and victories testified to Christians' wrongdoing.

Another very eminent contemporary witness, who in any case was from Africa and who perhaps originated in Cyrenaica to the east, the later Abbot Hadrian of England, wrote, "thus Ismael's race was that of the Saracens, a race which is never at peace with anyone but is always at war with someone."⁶³ His is probably an embittered opinion about contemporary Arabs by one who was a refugee from troubled North Africa late in the seventh century.

Given the very pressing financial needs for defending his empire against the Persians and then the Arabs, Heraclius and his advisers naturally sought to squeeze North Africa for tax revenues. His last treasurer (*sakellarios*), Philagrius, the one who was in office when Heraclius died, was temporarily exiled to Africa, to Septem (modern Ceuta) in 641, immediately

⁶¹ Maximus, Ep. to Peter the illustrious, *PG* 90: 540, 541. Date: Sherwood 1952, 39-40.

⁶² On Peter: sv. "Petrus 709," *PLRE* 3: 1013.

⁶³ *Pentl* 104, first series of Pentateuch commentaries contained in Milan, Biblioteca Ambrosiana, M. 79, quoted in Bischoff and Lapidge 1994, 324-5 cf. p. 92, 456. Hadrian appears to have been born not later than 637, possibly earlier, and died in 709 or 710, Bischoff and Lapidge 1994: 82-4. Handley 2004: 296-7, rejects the opinion of Lapidge and instead believes that Hadrian of Canterbury came from some region further west in North Africa.

after the death of Heraclius, during the brief regime of Heraclius' widow Martina.⁶⁴ Philagrius was responsible for starting to set up a new comprehensive census of land and livestock in the empire. While in exile Philagrius cannot have ignored the wealth of North Africa. So, on his return to Constantinople, recalled to his responsibilities as *sakellarios* from exile after a favorable change in the power struggle for the imperial succession after the death of Heraclius, by late 641 Philagrius probably decided to intensify efforts in Africa to collect tax revenues and tap local wealth to support the ever more desperate defenses of the empire in the east against the rapidly expanding forces of Islam. More than any other Byzantine Emperor Heraclius conceived of North Africa as an integral part of the Byzantine Empire. The loss of Egypt's tax revenues in 642–6 caused North Africa's resources to rise to even greater prioritization in imperial policy-making. The coming and going of other exiles to and from Africa further made officials at Constantinople aware of the wealth of North Africa in times of dire need for additional resources.⁶⁵

Events in Egypt in the 640s may have had another hitherto unnoticed effect. The Byzantine naval intervention against the Muslims in Egypt in 645–6 by the eunuch Manuel, on orders of Constans II or his officials,⁶⁶ possibly encouraged local hopes in Africa that the Byzantine emperor and the Muslims in Egypt were too busy fighting one another to be able to intervene in North Africa. Those hopes proved to be false, as both parties quickly demonstrated their continuing ability to intervene. The Muslims drove out the abortive Egyptian military expedition of Manuel. Constans II demonstrated that he was able to send forces and officials to Africa to represent him.

Suppositions of influence from North Africa on Heraclius are not new. Scholars once assumed that Heraclius created the Byzantine "theme system" (military corps and their districts and related social and economic institutions) in the early 620s in Anatolia because of inspiration from his experience in Africa with the exarchate, in which the governor combined civil and military powers. Today few still believe that Heraclius created the military institution of the themes or that the exarchates inspired the

⁶⁴ Nicephorus, *Short History*, c. 30 (Mango 81); *Chronicle of John, Bishop of Nikiu* 120.23, 120.53, states that Philagrius was exiled to Tripoli (Charles 191, 197).

⁶⁵ Hendy 1985: 171–2, argues that Africa provided a modest part of the empire's budget, that its revenues amounted to only a tenth of those from the Prefecture of the East (pre-Islamic Conquest). The loss of Egypt to the Muslims, however, made Africa an extremely valuable surviving tax-producing region. Differing view of earlier prominence of Egypt: Sarris 2006: 10–14.

⁶⁶ Sv. "Manuel 3," *PLRE* 3: 811.

emergence of the themes.⁶⁷ But the case does show that Heraclius' African experiences have been invoked to explain, however erroneously, major institutional and policymaking changes elsewhere in the empire two decades after he seized the throne.

With whatever sentimental memories of North Africa Heraclius retained and passed on to other members of his family, he also bequeathed memories of conspiracies and treachery. His own and the rebellion of his father Heraclius against the usurping Emperor Phocas were a core of that heritage. But his own reign in the east had successfully weathered other conspiracies and military unrest of various unworthies who included Comentiolus the brother of Phocas, Priscus, Heraclius' own illegitimate son Athalaric and nephew Theodore and various Armenian conspirators, and reportedly even Vahan, Master of the Soldiers in the East (*magister militum per Orientem*).⁶⁸ The violent removal and mutilation of Heraclius' controversial second wife Martina and her sons in 641, who lacked ties with Africa, may have caused no regrets in North Africa but it was another symptom of internal instability even at the ultimate seat of government. It may even have aroused dismay or disgust and disillusionment in some North Africans with their imperial family and the wisdom, serenity, and solidity of its authority. The youth of Constans II, the grandson of Heraclius from his first marriage, to Fabia/Eudocia, was not reassuring. The haunted and violent Heraclian heritage contained contradictory elements that were not easy for Byzantines and North Africans to resolve on the eve of the arrival of the Muslims in North Africa.

⁶⁷ The themes: Haldon 1993; Haldon 1999; Brandes 2002, and its detailed review by Haldon 2003: 717–28. Important reinterpretation: Jean-Claude Cheynet, "La mise en place des thèmes d'après les sceaux," paper communicated in the Panels, Programme, 21st International Congress of Byzantine Studies, London 23 August 2006, publication forthcoming. On the basis of lead seals Cheynet dates the territorial authority of the Byzantine themes to the fourth decade of the eighth century.

⁶⁸ Nichanian 2008.

The shock of Sbeitla

THE SETTING AND STRATEGIC STRUCTURES 642–7

Events at or near Sufetula, that is, modern central Tunisian Sbeitla, an attractive if sun-baked modest-sized city with impressive Roman public buildings, in the interior of the province of Byzacena sent out tremors that shook the empire and even lands north of the Mediterranean outside of imperial authority. Muslim expeditions into North Africa followed 'Amr's conquest of Egypt in 642,¹ but already the Byzantine decisions and actions had tied the fate of North Africa to Egypt. The initial strength of the Muslims who occupied Egypt was about 15,500.² Emperor Heraclius had sought unsuccessfully to transfer elite mobile troops from Numidia to help defend Egypt against marauding Arabs in 632/3. The *Notitia Dignitatum*, a Late Antique Latin list of imperial ranks and offices and insignia from the Theodosian era, reveals that Numidian and Moorish units had long been stationed in localities of Late Roman Egypt.³ Moreover, the Legio III Cyrenaica had once been stationed in the provincia Arabia, which straddles modern southern Syria and Jordan, so old precedents and procedures existed for sending troops from North Africa to protect Syria and Egypt.

The selected yet controversial Byzantine relief striking force for Egypt was situated in Numidia, rather than elsewhere in Byzantine North Africa, in the early 630s. Probably the Byzantines kept their best mobile

¹ Kaegi 1998; standard older narrative on Egypt: Butler 1978; Fraser 1991: sv. "Arab Conquest of Egypt," *Coptic Encyclopedia* 1: 183–9; excellent is Sijpesteijn 2007a; Suermann 2006; 'Athamina 1997: 112–13.

² Kennedy 2001: 4.

³ *Notitia Dignitatum*, ed. O. Seeck (Leipzig: 1876, repr.): Or. c. 25, c. 28, for Cohors Quarta Numidarum, and Cuneus Equitum Maurorum Scutariorum. See papyrological attestations for Mauri in Egypt in the fifth century: B. Palme, *Corpus Papyrorum Raineri*, vol. xxiv, *Griechische Texte*, vol. xvii (Vienna 2002), Items 4–7, Excursus 1 and Table 1, pp. 20–53, and esp. n. 3, p. 23 for broader scholarship on the stationing of Mauri in Egypt. Ritterling, "Legio," *RE* 12: 144–1501, 1508–13.

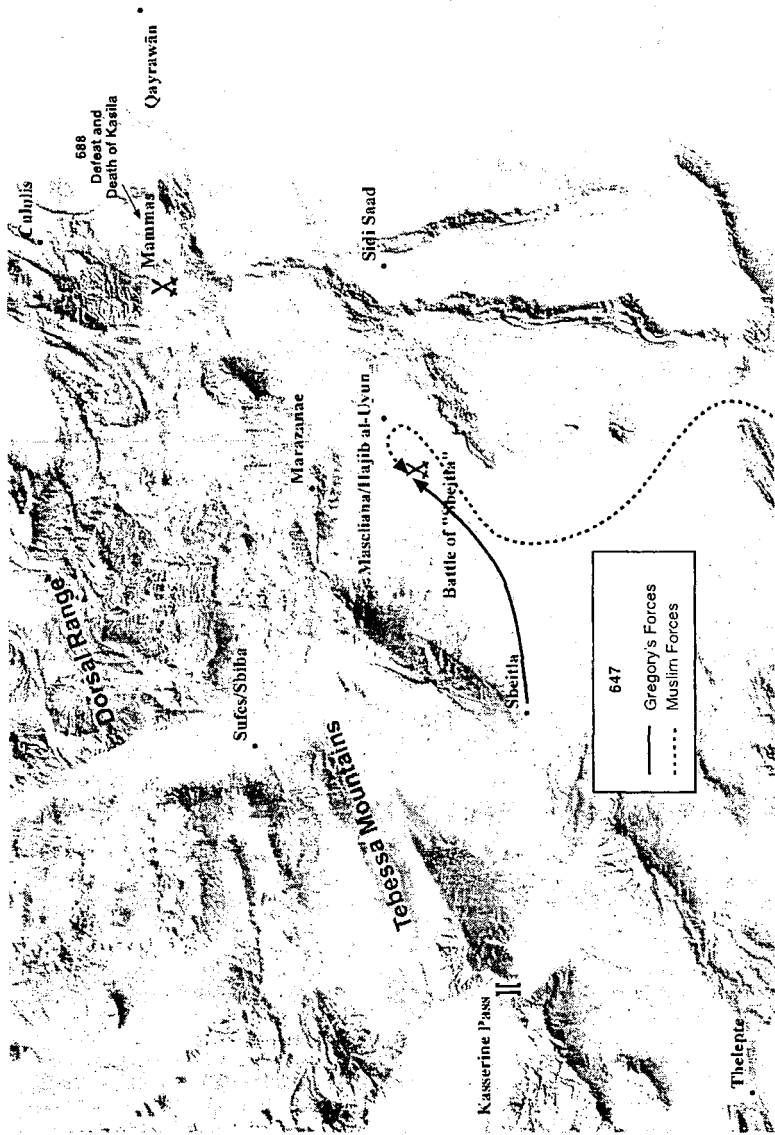
North African striking forces in Numidia at that time to be able to move to respond quickly to autochthonous challenges from several possible directions. Sources do not report precisely where in Numidia the Byzantines concentrated their best mobile forces, but like the earlier Romans, they probably chose to keep some in the south, namely between Zabi Justiniana (Bechilga or Bechligha, a few kilometers east of M'sila in the Hodna) and Tebessa, where they could respond swiftly to challenges from the south and east. They did not concentrate or hold them in reserve in the coastal regions and not at the difficult of access and mountain-shrouded and rock-ribbed fastness and provincial capital of Constantine. It is possible that Frike, or the medieval Ksar el-Frigui, fifty kilometers southeast of Constantine, had been the base for Byzantine mobile troops in Late Antique Numidia, until it moved to Tigisis where it was located at the commencement of the Muslim conquest in 641.⁴ From Tigisis mobile troops could serve a triple function: protection of communications between Constantine and Carthage, between Constantine and Tebessa, and finally, north-south communications in easternmost Numidia, between Tebessa and Medaurus and Hippo Regius (Būna, colonial Bône, modern Annaba).

In the sixth century, according to a Justinianic edict of 534, that is immediately after the reconquest from the Vandals, the towns of Gafsa and Thelepte served as seats for the *dux* of Byzacena or Byzacium.⁵ These were appropriate sites for such responsibilities. How long the institutional arrangement of a *dux* for Byzacium lasted is uncertain. By the late sixth or middle of the seventh century Sufetula (Sbeitla), which lay further north, appears to be taking the former roles of Gafsa and Thelepte for the location of the residence of the military commander who was responsible for that part of the province of Byzacium (Byzacena) (see Map 6). A Byzantine lead seal refers to one Ioannes, who was *cubicularius*, or chamberlain, *spatharius*, and *magister militum* or master of the soldiers, for Byzacium⁶

⁴ Sage remark of N. Duval, *AT* 10 (2002) 43, 51, 59–60. See esp. the famous inscription at Timgad left by John dux of Tigisis (*Ioannes dux de Tigisi*) in 641 or 643: *CIL* 8: 2389, 17822 = *Inscriptiones Latinae Christianae Veteres* 1832 (ed. E. Diehl, vol. 1, p. 361).

⁵ *Codex Justinianus* 1.27.2.1 (534 CE).

⁶ sv. "Ioannes 130," *PLRE* 3: 687. G. Zacos and A. Vegler, *Byzantine Lead Seals* (Basel: 1972) 1: No. 2885. Cf. "Ioannes 215," *PLRE* 3: 698. See V. Laurent, *Les sceaux byzantins du Méditerranéen Vatican*, Seal No. 91, on p. 84 n. 1. (Vatican City: 1962) I owe this reference to eminent Austrian sigillographer Dr. Werner Seibt. Zografopoulos 2006. The Numidian *magister militum* receives mention on p. 88. Seibt asserted that this above seal should not be dated earlier than 670 CE, because of the use of the dative on the seal. Zografopoulos' new Austrian dissertation, which is also titled "Die byzantinische Bleisiegel aus Karthago," discusses this material, but it has been unavailable to me. The criteria for assigning a date are disputed. I thank Werner Seibt for discussing this reference



Map 6 647 Sbeitla campaign and battle site of Mammās 688

Scale c. 1 : 900,000

This seal significantly attests the existence of *magister militum* for the troubled, exposed, and vulnerable province of Byzacena, probably in the late sixth century. Nothing more is known of this institution in Byzacena, or of its institutional structures, but its existence is very noteworthy. It was probably created to help improve the defenses of a very threatened and beleaguered province well before the emergence of any threat from the Muslims.⁷ The likely motive was the desire to devise a military official with specific responsibility for the defense of the province of Byzacena. At approximately the same time in the late sixth century another *magister militum* emerged, one for Numidia. The title of the command of course is a very old one, although new for these specific regions. Probably these two *magistri militum* in Byzantine North Africa continued to exercise command over critical military units that confronted the Muslims in the late seventh century, respectively for Byzacena and for Numidia.⁸ No muster rolls exist, but the two *magistri militum* probably each commanded at least several thousand soldiers, both foot and horse.

John Barkaines (of Barqa), who evidently came from Barqa (modern al-Marj, northeastern Libya) in Cyrenaica, commanded some of the Byzantine forces that unsuccessfully tried to defend Egypt from the Muslims at the end of the 630s. He fell at the decisive battle between Byzantines and Muslims at 'Ayn Shams (ancient Heliopolis), near what is now Cairo, Egypt, probably in July 640. His death shocked and brought grief to Emperor Heraclius. John had probably brought with him to Egypt some contingents from Cyrenaica, but no precise information exists. The death of John of Barqa did not necessarily determine the fate of North Africa of course, even though the death of such a prominent person imperiled military and civilian morale and underscored the gravity of the Muslim threat. At any rate, already North Africa's and Egypt's fates were intertwined to some degree.⁹

A distant Byzantine territorial loss adversely affected Byzantine North Africa from another direction, to the north. The Lombard King Rotari's aggressive attack against Byzantine Liguria resulted in the total collapse

with me. But Dumbarton Oaks sigillographer Dr. John W. Nesbitt, whom I also thank for advice, persuasively questions attribution to the seventh century. It is probable that the earlier scholarly preference for a late sixth-century date is more persuasive. Also Morrisson and Seibt 1982.

⁷ Again, no indication of any themal organization, for *magister militum* and its Greek form *stratelates* is traditional.

⁸ As Dr. John W. Nesbitt commented to me in a conversation on April 2, 2007.

⁹ sv. "Ioannes 246," "Ioannes 249," *PLRE* 3: 704–5. Nicephorus, *Short History* 23.2 (70–1, 189 Mango); Kaegi 2003c: 283–4; Kaegi 1998: 51, 61; John of Nikiu, *Chron.* 116.1–2 (184 Charles), 111.15 (180 Charles).

and loss of Byzantine control in that strategic section of northwest Italy c. 643. The loss of Liguria, whether due to tactical inadequacy, weakness of Byzantine forces, lack of logistical support, poor planning, or the sheer strength of the Lombards, dealt a sharp blow to Byzantine prestige in the entire surrounding region. It also reduced potential reserve territory for Byzantine North Africa and increased the threat against the Byzantine-controlled islands of Corsica and Sardinia.¹⁰ It eliminated another potential source for recruits and for revenues as well as a base for Byzantine warships. It added to the pressures against the empire's grip in the central and western Mediterranean. It underscored Byzantine vulnerability, even in North Africa.¹¹ It represented a distinct shrinkage of the empire on the eve of major Muslim expeditionary activity in North Africa.

Centrifugal trends and events in the shrinking areas that remained under Byzantine control, such as Byzantine-controlled sections of Italy, affected Byzantine North Africa. They included soldiers' mutinies and abortive attempts to seize power.¹² The revolt of Gregory the Exarch (governor general) in 645–7 in Byzantine North Africa falls into that broader pattern. He rebelled against the imperial government in Constantinople. Whether or not he was a member of the family of Gregory, the uncle of Emperor Heraclius, is uncertain. Many have assumed it, but it is thus far a mere hypothesis and nothing more.¹³ Probably Gregory's revolt involved the temptation to attempt local resistance and independence without paying taxes to Constantinople. It was very inopportune to attempt that policy. For the Muslims had just conquered Egypt, Cyrenaica (the Barqa region, that is al-Marj), and the Tripolitanian towns of Tripoli and Sabratha, which lay nearby just to the east of the Byzantine African province of Byzacena. The Muslim tradent Sayf b. 'Umar, as reported by al-Ṭabarī, speaks of the *al-ajall* or exalted one as commander of diverse forces. Sayf probably refers to the Exarch Gregory, who also led some autochthonous forces.¹⁴ It is plausible that the Muslim expedition into

¹⁰ Liguria in the remote past (fifth century CE) had served as a base for potential military operations in North Africa. Procopius, *Wars* 3, 7.4–13.

¹¹ Neil Christie 1990: 264–6; Fredegarius, *Chronicarum ... Libri IV*, 71, ed. B. Krusch *MGH SRM*, 2 (1888), 156–7; Cosentino 1993: 40–3; Hodgkin 1967: VI: 168–70. However one theory rejects the notion of a real and well-organized Byzantine fleet in 641: Zuckerman 2005. But for a nuanced opinion on existence of a Byzantine navy: Cosentino 2007.

¹² T. S. Brown 1984: 144–63; Guillou 1969: 203–28.

¹³ Mango 1985: 113–14. Theophanes, *Chronicle*, AM. 6139 (Mango and Scott 478). See Modéran 2003a: 686; also Modéran sv. "Grégoire," *EB* 3211–13.

¹⁴ Abū Ja'far Muḥammad b. Jarīr Al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh al-rusul wa al-mulūk (Annales)*, ed. M. J. de Goeje *et al.* 15 vols. (Leiden: 1879–1901) I: 2814–15 = trans. by R. S. Humphreys, *The History of*

Cyrenaica in 641/2 under 'Amr¹⁵ took place in summer, before the autumnal rains.¹⁶ Gregory's revolt in fact weakened Africa's defenses, just as the abortive revolt of Godas on Sardinia against the Vandal King Gelimer had weakened the defenses of the Vandal kingdom at a fatal moment, the commencement of the Byzantine reconquest in 533. Both, however, were symptomatic of structural failures in the two successive regimes in North Africa.

Gregory's revolt was not primarily any kind of autochthonous uprising whether nationalist or not.¹⁷ The veracity of some kind of claim to independence from Constantinople on the part of Gregory cannot be doubted, as the proceedings of the Constantinopolitan trial of Maximus the Confessor as well as Muslim traditions transmitted by Ibn 'Abd al-Hakam attest.¹⁸ Anonymity shrouds the identity of the Romano-African elites and ordinary farmers and autochthonous men who formed the core of his supporters. He may have sought to emulate the earlier successful revolt of and seizure of power by Heraclius from North Africa.¹⁹ Military unrest and instability at and around Constantinople after the death of Heraclius and Heraclius Constantine (Constantine III) created a situation that tempted ambitious local leaders to try to seize power for themselves, especially while the emperor, who was born in 630, was a vulnerable teenager. As the contemporary Armenian history attributed to Sebeos put it, Emperor Constans II had to obtain the permission of important military officers in order to make controversial peace treaties with the Muslims: "because he was young [he] did not have the authority to carry this out without the agreement of the army."²⁰

The abortive but dangerous rebellion against Constans II by the Armenian commander (probably *comes excubitorum* but possibly *magister militum per Orientem*) Valentine Aršakuni in the vicinity of Constantinople

al-Tabari vol. xv: *The Crisis of the Early Caliphate* (Albany: 1990) pp. 19–20. The meaning of the vague term *al-ajall* is uncertain.

¹⁵ Goodchild 1967, repr. *Libyan Studies* 1976: 255–67.

¹⁶ Christides 2000: 38–9 agrees.

¹⁷ Ernest Mercier 1888: 1: 196, Mercier 1895–6: 191 theorized that Gregory based his revolt on Berber nationalism. Modéran, sv. "Grégoire," *EB* 3211–13.

¹⁸ *The Life of Maximus the Confessor*, c. 53 (lines 1321–6), pp. 1412–50; *Relatio*, PG 90: 112–13. Also Ibn 'Abd al-Hakam, *Conquête* (in Gateau 1948: 42–3). Most scholars have previously agreed that Gregory sought to seize power, but there has been an effort to revise that opinion. However the prosecutors of Maximus explicitly claim that Gregory sought to be a rival to Emperor Constans II and that Maximus supported those unsuccessful ambitions: Neil 2006a.

¹⁹ Guéry 1981: 66–8. Durliat 1999: 56 speculates that Gregory was trying to establish a completely independent state in North Africa, comparable to that of the Vandals or of the abortive sixth-century military usurper Stotzas, but we know little of Stotzas' ambitions.

²⁰ Sebeos, *Hist.*, c. 147 (1: 112 Thomson and Howard-Johnston, and commentary on 11: 260).



Figure 2 Solidus of Constans II. Constantinople. Date: 651–4. *DO Cat* 2, 2 no. 23b BZC 1961.8.D2009.bw. © Dumbarton Oaks, Byzantine Collection, Washington, DC.



Figure 3 Solidus of Constans II with young son Constantine IV. Constantinople. Date: 654–9. *DO Cat* 2, 2 no. 27b BZC 48/17.2183. © Dumbarton Oaks, Byzantine Collection, Washington, DC.

in late 644 or early 645 underscored the tenuousness of young Constans II's hold on the government at the center of empire as well as the risks of any attempt at usurpation (see Figures 2 and 3).²¹ Valentine Aršakuni was executed but his rebellion was disruptive.

²¹ Sebeos, *Hist.*, c. 142–3 (Thomson and Howard-Johnston 1999: 1: 106–7, 11: 253–4); John of Nikiu, *Chron.* 120.61–9 (198–9 Charles); Kaegi 1981a: 155–73; sv. “Valentinus 5,” *PLRE* 3: 1354–5; s.v., “Ualentinus,” no. 8545, *PMBZ* 5: 69–74, esp. p. 71 for date of final break between Constans II and Valentinus and the latter's murder.

THE BATTLE: FIRST RAIDS AND CONTESTED
MEMORY AT SUFETULA (SBEITLA)

Initial Muslim raids from Muslim-occupied Tripolitania in 647 struck at Sufetula (modern Sbeitla, Arabic Subayṭila) and its vicinity in the east and south from what is modern Libya, especially from the region of Tripoli. Caliph 'Uthmān²² authorized his foster brother and governor of Egypt 'Abd Allāh b. Sa'd b. Abī Sarḥ to lead an expedition into Byzantine North Africa.²³ By appointing a relative 'Uthmān presumably sought to maintain control of the military venture. 'Abd Allāh b. Sa'd b. Abī Sarḥ's forces included other prominent Meccans such as the future Umayyad caliph Marwān b. al-Ḥakam and his family's eventual rival 'Abd Allāh b. al-Zubayr, as well as 'Abd Allāh b. 'Umar b. al-Khattāb.²⁴ This was a major endeavor. Al-Nuwayrī proudly lists prominent North Arabian and especially Meccan tribes and Quraysh families and clans that numbered participants in that expedition.²⁵ They included the Banū Hāshim, Banū Umayya, the Taym, the 'Ād, Asad, Hudhayl, Ka'b b. 'Amr, Muzayna, 'Āmir b. Lu'ayy, Ghatafān, Zuhra, Juhayna, Aslam, Banū Sulaym, the Sahm, and al-Dayl. Members of these tribes and clans and families participated in and prospered from the prestige and wealth that accrued from raiding North Africa.²⁶ By the fourteenth century CE recognition and celebration of the fame of these tribes, clans, and families had become a priority in some Muslim narratives of those long-past events. This was a selective memory. Familial rivalry left echoes in the extant historiographical record concerning the earliest Muslim campaigning in North Africa.

The contested Muslim memory of the first major Muslim expedition gives disputed credit to three different individuals of the prestigious Meccan tribe of Quraysh for the honor of bringing the news of the Muslim victory from 'Abd Allāh b. Sa'd b. Abī Sarḥ to the Commander of the Believers or *amīr al-mu'minīn* 'Uthmān, who was at Medina at that time: 'Abd Allāh

²² Traditional ascription of title Caliph to 'Uthmān is used here, although Islamicists dispute who first took the title Caliph; some argue that the first was Mu'āwiya. On 'Uthmān, Madelung 1997: 78–140.

²³ al-Ṭabarī (Wāqidī), *Tārīkh* 1: 2818; Yāqūt b. 'Abd Allāh al-Rūmī, *Mu'jam al-buldān* (Beirut: 1955) 1: 229; Caetani, 1905–26: VII: 180–207.

²⁴ Baladurī, *Futūḥ*, (De Goeje): 226. Trans. P. Hitti, *Origins of the Islamic State* (New York: 1916): 356. Al-Ya'qūbī, *al-Buldān*, 349. 'Abd Allāh b. al-Zubayr: H. A. R. Gibb, sv., "Abd Allāh b. al-Zubayr," *EP* 1: 54–5.

²⁵ Al-Nuwayrī, *Nihāya* XXIV: 7–10.

²⁶ Ibn 'Idhārī al-marrākushi, *al-Bayān al-mughrib fī akhbār al-Andalus wa-al-maghrib*, ed. G. Colin and E. Levi-Provençal (Beirut: 1983): 13–14. On North Arabian tribes associated with the Prophet: Donner 1981: 20–8, 101–11.

b. al-Zubayr (foster brother of 'Uthmān), Marwān b. al-Ḥakam (cousin of 'Uthmān), and 'Uqba b. Nāfi', who was a nephew (on his mother's side) of the very able 'Amr b. al-'Āṣ, the conqueror and long-time governor of Egypt. In fact it was 'Uthmān who granted the unusual honor of delivering a report on the battle at or near Sbeitla to Ibn al-Zubayr from the pulpit at Medina. However 'Uthmān granted great material benefits to Marwān b. al-Ḥakam, who arrived in Medina late but successfully laid claim to the very substantial sum of 500,000 dirhams of the booty from that expedition to North Africa, even though allegedly, according to the rival Zubayrid version, he did not himself accomplish any extraordinary feats.²⁷ In these traditions, some of which the biased tradent Ibn Lahī'a transmits, Ibn al-Zubayr is presumed to have slain Gregory by his own hand. This tradition retains favorable mention of Ibn al-Zubayr despite his own subsequent final defeat and death in 692 at the hands of the Marwānids in the second Muslim civil war or *fitna*.²⁸ Ibn 'Abd al-Ḥakam had given much prominence to al-Zubayr himself (father of Ibn al-Zubayr) in his narrative of the Muslim conquest of Egypt. This partiality for Zubayrids continues in his narrative of campaigning in North Africa. The prominence of descendants of Zubayr in the narrative may well reflect actual historical realities as well as the importance of descendants in the 'Abbāsīd era. They do not necessarily represent late anti-Umayyad agenda.²⁹ However all of these Islamic traditions warrant a critical skepticism. Still more complications may derive from possible Egyptian traditionalists' wish to exaggerate the presence of Meccan families in early Muslim Egypt. The Muslim historical memory of those events is not a neutral one. It is colored by competing claims, jealousies, and even by Shiite and late 'Abbāsīd criticism of the Umayyads. It is not an easy task to peel away these layers of criticism to find any unvarnished core of historical truth.

The Muslim commander 'Abd Allāh b. Sa'd b. Abī Sarḥ attacked Tripoli, the western Libyan oasis town of Ghadāmis, and Elenptien (possibly Leptis Magna or Lampta, that is, Leptis Minor, in Tunisia, or Thelepte, near Kasserine), according to a Spanish medieval

²⁷ 'Alī b. al-Ḥusayn Abu'l-Faraj al-Iṣfahānī, *Kitāb al-Aghānī*, 17 vols. (Cairo: 1927–38) vi: 266–9, al-Nuwayrī, *Nihāyat* xxiv: 13–17, for the Zubayrid family version of events. Ibn 'Abd al-Ḥakam, *Futūḥ Miṣr* (Torrey): 185–6; Gateau 1948: 42–55; on his sources, see comments of Gateau 1948: 19–25. Also Khoury 1986: 199–209; Ibn Lahī'a's partiality for Ibn al-Zubayr distorts the narrative of Ibn 'Abd al-Ḥakam.

²⁸ Aḥmad b. Ishāq al-Ya'qūbī, *Ta'rikh*, ed. M. Th. Houtsma (Leiden: 1983) 11: 191. Madelung 1997: 365, n. 44.

²⁹ I learned much from discussion of this issue with my distinguished Arabist colleague Wadad al-Kadi.

chronicle.³⁰ He also initially attempted to capture the Byzacene or southern Tunisian port of Gabes, but its inhabitants used the security of their city walls to reject his overtures.³¹ He could not draw them out. He then moved to the interior. That region of Byzantine Africa called the province of Byzacium (Arabic derivative Muzak) or Byzacena³² was vulnerable to Muslim raiding and would have submitted or been overrun expeditiously. Muslim raiders slaughtered livestock – horses, camels, sheep, cattle – to induce North Africans' subjugation to 'Abd Allāh b. Sa'd.³³

An initial question to ask is the reason for the prominence of central Tunisian Sbeitla.³³ Sbeitla's extant ruins including its handsome Capitulum demonstrate its size and importance. The presence of the grave of Gregory's immediate or recent predecessor Peter and at least one other prominent burial there dated to 638³⁴ underscore the importance that the city already held immediately before the Muslim penetration of North Africa. It was a nodal point in Byzacium. But it was no impregnable fortress. No impressive city walls surrounded its perimeter, even though some of its complex of old Roman buildings had been sheathed with a skin of masonry in an improvised fashion to improve the site's short-term or provisional defensibility. This was no rock-ribbed fastness like Constantine in Numidia. It was not a town suitable for any Stalingrad-like stand to the end.

Sources are suboptimal. The earliest primary source is a Merovingian Frankish one Fredegarius, who probably recorded his brief Latin allusion sometime around 660 or between 658 and 715 CE. He mentions the death of Gregory and the ruin of all of Africa, but does not specifically refer to Sbeitla or any other North African place name.³⁵ Sources offer no consensus on the exact location. The earliest extant Muslim narrative is that of Khalifa b. Khayyāt al-'Uṣfūrī (d. 854), who specifies the death of Gregory and a locale some seventy miles from Qayrawān in the direction of

³⁰ *Additamenta IV. V. Continuatio Byzantia Arabica a. DCCXXLI; V. Continuatio Hispana a. DCCLIV*, c. 27, *MGHAA* 11: 344. *Crónica mozárabe de 754* (López Pereira), c. 28: pp. 48–9.

³¹ Al-Nuwayrī, *Nihāya* xxiv: 11. Ibn Abī Dīnār, *al-Mu'nis* 38. Speculative in Benabbès 2004: 208–9.

³² Al-Mālikī, *Riyād* 17; Ibn al-'Aṭham al-Kūfī, Abū Muḥammad Aḥmad, *Kitāb al-Futūḥ*, ed. M. al-'Abbāsī and S. 'Abd al-Wahhāb al-Bukhārī, 8 vols. (Hyderabad: 1968–75) 11: 135.

³³ Kaegi 2006a.

³⁴ N. Duval, quoted in "Discussion," *AT* 10 (2002) 49.

³⁵ Fredegarius, *Chron.*, c. 81, (Krusch): 162; Frédégaire, *Chronique des temps mérovingiens*, ed. and trans. O. Devillers and J. Meyers (Turnhout: 2001): 182–5; *The Fourth Book of the Chronicle of Fredegar*, trans. J. M. Wallace-Hadrill (London; New York: 1960): 68–9. Basic: Goffart 1963; Collins 2007: 25–7.

Sbeitla; that could place it not very far from Sbeitla.³⁶ Ibn 'Abd al-Ḥakam of Egypt (d. 871) specifically mentions the death of Gregory but not the precise locality of the military combat.³⁷ Ibn al-Athīr states that the battle took place a day and a half from Sbeitla.³⁸ Still later is the Maghribi historian Al-Mālikī, who provides some details about the Muslims' devising of ambushes, protracted combat, and an assault very late in the day.³⁹ Derivative from other Muslim sources is the late Egyptian summary narrative of al-Nuwayrī (1279–1333 CE, which he was composing around 1314–18), *Nihāyat al-arab fi funūn al-adab*.⁴⁰ Certain Christian Semitic (Syriac and Arabic) sources report the revolt, survival, and flight of Gregory,⁴¹ as may Theophanes Confessor in his chronicle,⁴² but Muslim sources⁴³ (with the exception of al-Ṭabarī (who claims to follow al-Wāqidi) and Ibn A'tham al-Kūfī⁴⁴) and western Latin sources more persuasively relate the death of Gregory.⁴⁵ Gregory probably perished in combat, although not in the fanciful manner that some later Arabic narrators claim.

AUTOCHTHONOUS PARTICIPATION: THE MAURI

At the so-called battle of Sbeitla in 647 CE the exarch and imperial usurper Gregory had probably gathered mobile troops from Numidia as well as from other parts of Byzantine North Africa. Gregory's troops included a unit of "Moors" or autochthonous forces: "*Maurorum acies*," or "army" or "formation of Moors," or "battle line of Moors," according to a plausible and important yet vague and somewhat confused account by an early medieval Spanish chronicler who continued the seventh-century chronicle

³⁶ Khalifa b. Khayyāt, *Ta'rikh*, 92.

³⁷ Ibn 'Abd al-Ḥakam, *Futūḥ Miṣr* (Torrey): 183. Ibn 'Abd al-Ḥakam (Gateau 1948): 42–5. Gateau has critical comments concerning deficiencies in the narrative.

³⁸ Ibn al-Athīr, *Kāmil*: 111: 89; ed. Tornberg 111: 69. The fourteenth-century historian Ibn Khaldūn, *Ta'rikh* 1v: 221–2 places combat at Sbeitla.

³⁹ Al-Mālikī, *Riyād* 1: 17–19. Idris 1969: 128.

⁴⁰ al-Nuwayrī, *Nihāya* xxiv: 11–17. On al-Nuwayrī, M. Chapoutot-Remadi, sv. "al-Nuwayrī, Shihāb al-Dīn Aḥmad b. 'Abd al-Wahhāb al-Bakrī al-Tamīmī al-Kurashī al-Shāfi'i," *EP* 8: 156–60.

⁴¹ Common Syrian source for these traditions: Hoyland 1997: 641; cf. Michael the Syrian, *Chronique* (Chabot) 11: 440–1. Agapius, *Kitāb al-Unwān* PO 8: 479 [219].

⁴² Theophanes, *Chronicle*, AM 6139 (Mango and Scott 478). Note comment of Modéran 2003a; also Modéran 1999.

⁴³ Including al-Kindī, *Wulāt Miṣr* (ed. H. Naṣṣār [Beirut: 1959]): 35. Al-Kindī's source wrongly believes that Mu'āwiya b. Ḥudayj slew Gregory and dates the event to AH 27. Another late source reporting the death of Gregory: al-Tijānī, *Rihlat al-Tijānī* 58.

⁴⁴ Al-Ṭabarī, *Tārikh* 1: 2818; Ibn A'tham, *Kitāb al-Futūḥ* 11: 136–7, both claim that Gregory purchased peace with 'Abd Allāh b. Sa'd b. Abī Sarḥ. Death of Gregory: Ibn Khaldūn, *Ta'rikh* VII: 10.

⁴⁵ Fredegarus, *Chron.*, 81. *Crónica mozárabe de 754* (López Pereira) c. 28, pp. 48–9.

of Isidore of Seville, although these autochthonous soldiers' numbers and tribal affiliations are unknown.⁴⁶ The Moors, who turned to flight, were present and serving in Gregory's army in the battle.⁴⁷ The blame for the disaster lay, according to this narrator, with the hasty flight of the Moorish troops, which caused the destruction of Gregory's elite force of local North Africans, who presumably were recruited from the North African land-owning elite and their dependants.⁴⁸ The narrator preserves a biased local Romano-African explanation or scapegoating and self-serving denial of responsibility for the disastrous outcome. The Muslims routed Gregory's North Africans. But the Spanish chroniclers have conflated references both to Constans II's naval defeat in 654 or 655 at the Battle of the Masts (Dhāt al-Ṣawāri) off the southwestern coast of Anatolia⁴⁹ with the North African campaign of 'Abd Allāh b. Sa'd b. Abī Sarḥ. In the much later fourteenth century Ibn Khaldūn refers to the presence of Christian forces that included "Franks [Faranja, presumably Latins], Byzantines [Rūm] and Berbers [Barbar, autochthonous]."⁵⁰

No explicit documentation exists in any language concerning either the participation of regular Byzantine troops, let alone specific units from Numidia, in the operations of the usurper Gregory around Sbeitla in 647 or concerning the position or attitude of officials or inhabitants of Numidia with respect to the revolt of Gregory, except for the above vague reference to autochthonous participation in the Byzantine forces of Gregory. However the exarch of Africa exercised authority over Numidia, so presumably Gregory enjoyed support or at least passive cooperation there. The mounted troops from Numidia were the best among those available to the Byzantines in North Africa.⁵¹ Presumably the Numidian military authorities, including possibly some *magister militum* for Numidia, and

⁴⁶ See c. 24, *Addimenta IV. V: Continuatio Byzantia Arabica a. DCCXLI; V. Continuatio Hispana a. DCCLIV* in *MGH AA* 11: 343–4.

⁴⁷ *Crónica mozárabe de 754* (López Pereira): 48–9. For a possible eastern source: Hoyland 1997: part IV: Excurses, B: "The Byzantine-Arab Chronicle of 741 and Its Eastern Source," pp. 611–30. D. Woods plausibly argues for a Greek as well as eastern sources for the Spanish chronicles of 741 and 754, in a forthcoming manuscript in preparation for publication.

⁴⁸ *Crónica mozárabe de 754* (López Pereira): 48–9.

⁴⁹ On this naval clash and possible related maritime and land operations by Muslim forces: Stratos (1980): 229–47; Christides 1985; and O'Sullivan 2004. For strong and plausible skepticism about O'Sullivan's hypothesis, arguing for confusion between 655 and 672–9: Pryor and Jeffreys 2006: 25, n. 34, 27, n. 39.

⁵⁰ Ibn Khaldūn, *Ta'rikh* IV: 222.

⁵¹ Noël Duval persuasively observes, as quoted in "Discussions," *AT* 10 (2002) 59, "l'armée de Numidie (peut-être réunie avec la Stifienne orientale), constituait évidemment, au moins avant la menace arabe, le groupe d'unités combattantes le plus important et le plus aguerri de l'armée d'Afrique."

local subjects did not oppose Gregory's rebellion. Some of these autochthonous troops within Gregory's rebellious ranks very well may have come from Numidia. Sbeitla was a central position. One can infer from the subsequent imperial accusations against Maximus the Confessor that the saint had persuasive influence in Numidia to sway actions, and one can read his alleged statement predicting victory to an imperial competitor from the west as a tacit indication that Numidia (or significant constituencies within Numidia) supported Gregory's rebellion.

ENDURING GEOGRAPHIC AND STRATEGIC
SIGNIFICANCE OF SBEITLA

The quadrangle of Sbeitla, Sbiba (Sufes), Gafsa, and Tebessa is a strategic center of gravity in North Africa, as bloody combats nearby again revealed to military historians in late 1942 and early 1943 in the vital Kasserine Pass and Tebessa campaign of World War II. Accumulating evidence for a more substantial Byzantine military presence, whether in the form of troops whose origins were in western Asia or troops raised from various African constituencies, including descendants of much earlier Roman veterans as well as mixed autochthonous groups, in the interior of Numidia explains why Sbeitla would be a reasonable crossroads for the concentration of troops, giving them the ability to move in different directions to respond to different Muslim initiatives. It was necessary for Gregory and his supporters to plug the Kasserine–Tebessa Gap if they cared to protect the northern sections of Byzacium and Zeugitana as well as Byzantine Numidia and points west from the Muslims. But probably Numidia and its capital of Constantine (Constantina) had low priority for the Byzantines in Carthage and Constantinople.

Gregory's establishment of his headquarters at Sbeitla potentially complicated the task of the Byzantine government in Constantinople. It was harder for the Byzantines to remove him or suppress his revolt by sending some punitive imperial naval expedition to Carthage, for the challenge remained for them to send an expeditionary force to find him and eliminate him and his followers. He became another in a series of local potentates who arose in the interior of North Africa (such as Gordian I, followed by Mastias, who proclaimed himself king of Numidians and Romans in an inscription in 476 when the Vandals overran North Africa; his son Ortaias succeeded him).⁵² Gregory's decision to move to Sbeitla

⁵² P. Morizot 1989: 263–84; Camps 1985: 307–24; Camps 1988: 153–7; Camps 1984.

also reflected the realization that Carthage was not the optimal place from which to direct the defense of North Africa against the Muslims. It was better to try to defend the region through a hands-on strategy closer to the actual threat. The danger for Gregory was that at Sbeitla he could be isolated and not understand the larger framework of events or be able to react to them with adequate flexibility. He probably did not recognize the dimensions of the formidable and growing resources that lay behind the initial Muslim raids into Tripolitania and that would confront him. But no reliable account exists of his motives and calculations. Gregory was probably trying to give battle in the defense of the interior of Byzacena. It was imperative to try to defend the relatively rich interior of the province from the perils of raiding.⁵³ It was inconceivable to concede it to the Muslims, which would have imperiled adjacent regions.

Sbeitla has additional significance. It was not only a place for the convenient gathering of Byzantine forces from northern Tunisia and eastern Algeria, but is also located in a region from which invaders from the east, that is, Tripolitania, who had followed the coastal road north and then penetrated the interior of Byzacena, could wheel westward to penetrate laterally across Numidia. No natural barriers exist except the hills near the Kasserine Pass and the Tebessa Mountains. Domination of Sbeitla opened or closed the way north as well as the direction west through the Kasserine–Tebessa Gap in the Tebessa mountain chain.⁵⁴ It exposed the entire region of lower Numidia, with its extensive pasturelands and fields of cereals, to raiders without any north–south natural barrier of mountains until far west of Siftif. It even threatened communications via the critical old Roman trunk military road between Numidia, via Tebessa and Ammaedara (modern Tunisian Haidra) to Carthage.

Therefore any Byzantine defeat at or near Sbeitla created enormous problems for Byzantine defense of lower Numidia as well as for the defense of what remained of the provinces of Byzacena and Zeugitana/Africa Proconsularis. Historically the region around Sbeitla had not taken on military significance for Roman or Byzantine defense facing the south-east or to protect Numidia, because there had been no significant invasions in strength from the east. Sbeitla in itself had no special significance or enormous commercial or historical or cultural value, and although its significance for agriculture and for livestock husbandry was respectable, other areas produced more crops and herds and flocks. But the area was a

⁵³ Fertility of Byzacena (Byzacium): Isidore of Seville (Barney *et al.*): 14.5.7.

⁵⁴ Winkler 1899.

strategically intelligent place to try to stop the Muslims from proceeding further north or west. The Muslim triumph at or near Sbeitla unhinged Byzantine defenses to the north and west and enormously challenged the Byzantines. It increased the value of the Kasserine–Tebessa Gap, even though there was always a danger that invaders from the east whose objective was Numidia could outflank this route by taking a route south of the Aures and then pushing north through gaps in the Aures chain.⁵⁵

Sbeitla is located in an agriculturally productive area where one could find sufficient provisions for Byzantine and allied soldiers and their mounts. By stationing himself at Sbeitla Gregory was able to survey and hoped to protect the interior and its internal road systems. If instead he had chosen Tacapae (Gabes), his opponents from Tripoli could have outflanked him, cut internal communications, and then ravaged the countryside in the interior. From Sbeitla he could protect the center, north, Numidia, and still remain in contact with other areas under Byzantine control. He did not wish his opponents to gain control of Sbeitla and its surrounding countryside, which would have given them many offensive options in addition to access to adequate provisions by foraging. Sbeitla could serve as a much better base in the interior than Gafsa, where the surrounding countryside is more arid and therefore less able to provide the provisions, water, and forage for any substantial mounted force. It is an exaggeration to claim that Gregory sought to establish his capital at Sbeitla; no explicit evidence exists for that. But he did seek to use it as a place for his command post and for the concentration of his troops.⁵⁶

Significantly the Muslims under 'Abd Allāh b. Sa'd b. Abī Sarḥ appear to have approached central Tunisia from the direction of the Mediterranean coast, perhaps initially following or paralleling the coastal road. They did not raid from the interior via Gafsa and Thelepte. But it was dangerous for them to give battle on the coast, where the Byzantines might utilize with profit their dominance of maritime communications. The Muslims needed a speedy and decisive clash in the interior. They needed a decisive test before they exhausted their limited provisions and their men and mounts. They found a place for combat in the interior, but without allowing themselves the risk of being cut off from their own lines of communications with Tripoli and other Muslim-controlled territory in Tripolitania.

⁵⁵ Côte 2003; P. Morizot et al., sv. "Aurès," *EB* 1066–1113; J. Morizot 1991.

⁵⁶ N. Duval (2002) as quoted in "Discussions," convincingly points out that Gregory used Sbeitla "comme point de regroupement des troupes et centre de commandement ... à l'approche de la première expédition arabe (plutôt que comme nouvelle capitale d'un usurpateur comme on le répète)..." *AT* 10 (2002) 49.

ROUT AND DESTRUCTION: WHAT WE DON'T KNOW

The actual events at Sbeitla found no eyewitness Byzantine or Latin narrator. All agree that the Byzantines suffered a major defeat, that the Muslims won a major victory. In the terminology of al-Mālikī's source, it was a "rout."⁵⁷ Muslim sources have enshrouded the battle with romantic stories about the fate of the daughter of Gregory. They agree, with one exception, that Gregory met his death in battle against the Muslims.

The contemporary, or almost contemporary, but distant Frankish chronicler Fredegarius states that as a consequence of the battle the whole of Africa was devastated and occupied little by little by the Saracens (*Africa tota vastatur* ...) and that the *patricius* Gregory was slain by "the Saracens," although he does not identify the location of Gregory's death.⁵⁸ A medieval Spanish chronicle reports that in the battle "all the flower of the African nobility" was "completely destroyed."⁵⁹ An alternative translation is: "Therefore the confrontation was prepared, whereupon the battle line of the Moors turned in flight and all of the nobility of Africa, along with count [that is, the exarch] Gregory, was destroyed to the point of extinction."⁶⁰ This helps to explain the military significance of the battle. The best of the Romano-African elites perished, making it difficult to reconstitute effective local military forces and their leadership. Any future resistance, after the catastrophe at or near Sbeitla, would require drawing on other military recruits in North Africa, or Byzantine forces from outside North Africa. Local elites had done their best and had failed and many had died. Viable resistance to the Muslims would require resort to other constituencies, including autochthonous ones, and to other military methods and diplomacy. Local elites had decisively failed in their efforts to devise their own solution to their challenges.

According to the late Muslim historian al-Mālikī, who cites a significant tradition from the important and often trustworthy tradent al-Wāqidi, Gregory's troops were afraid of fighting Arabs in ranged combat, in fixed formations,⁶¹ so a Coptic adviser to 'Abd Allāh b. Sa'd b. Abī Sarḥ counseled him to arrange scattered ambushes. This glimpse of details suggests that a significant portion of the Byzantine combatants were poorly trained

⁵⁷ Al-Mālikī, *Riyāḍ* 19.

⁵⁸ Fredegarius, *Chron.*, 81. There may be an eastern source for this information.

⁵⁹ *Continuatio*, par. 24. *Additamenta IV. V: Continuatio Byzantia Arabica a. DCCXXI; V. Continuatio Hispana a. DCCLIV* in *MGH AA* II: 344.

⁶⁰ Translation from chronicles of 741 and 754 in Hoyland 1997: 618.

⁶¹ *Maurice's Strategikon*, dated to about 600, provides information about the kinds of fixed formations for infantry and cavalry that were normal at that time.

local and Byzantine troops who may have known how to fight in formation, but were afraid to engage in frontal combat (or were alerted to some problems of fighting Arabs). It is possible that the reluctance to fight in ranged combat actually refers to autochthonous preference for avoidance of fighting in open formation on plains, which Procopius mentions in the middle of the sixth century.⁶² Ibn Khaldūn in the still more remote early fourteenth century CE indicates that the autochthonous disinclination to fight in fixed formation persisted in North Africa three quarters of a millennium after the sixth-century historian Procopius recorded his similar observations about their fear of fighting in close formation.⁶³ So it is indeed plausible that the autochthonous contingents that served with Gregory broke and fled in the face of disciplined Muslim ranks. This may not be simply an excuse or blame circulated by the surviving remnants of the Latin and Byzantine soldiers and their supporters. There is another explanation. Byzantine troops and their commanders had received advice from Emperor Heraclius and directly or indirectly from military manuals to avoid open combat with the Muslims.⁶⁴ The policy of avoiding ranged battle could be a heritage from Heraclius, even though the Roman fighting forces under Gregory were in rebellion against the Heraclian dynasty and Heraclius' grandson.

Probably Gregory's troops had little experience with fighting in fixed formation, for that had not been the recent practice or need in North Africa during clashes with troublesome autochthonous raiders, unlike conditions of warfare in the east where Byzantine armies needed such fixed formations in fighting the Persians and other foes. Late in the afternoon (when the shade was two lances' length) the Muslims attacked from all directions and scattered the Romans (Byzantines).⁶⁵ This is a plausible if very sketchy and late account of the clash. It deserves close attention.

It seems that Gregory's Roman or Byzantine forces attempted to engage in some kind of search or pursuit mission and were caught in ambushes. Muslims may have resorted to their old tactic of some variant of feigned flight. The core elements of Gregory's force were not necessarily irregular autochthonous troops. The advice to Muslims to devise scattered ambushes, according to the source of al-Mālikī, came from "a Copt," that

⁶² Procopius, *Wars* 4.12.4.

⁶³ Ibn Khaldūn, *Ta'rikh* 1: 289.

⁶⁴ Michael the Syrian, *Chronique* (Chabot) 11: 424–5; Chabot, *Histoire Nestorienne/Chronique de Séert*, PO 13: 626; Agapius, *Kitāb al-Unwān*, PO 8: 471; Anonymous, *Chron. ad annum 1234 per-tinens*, CSCO c. 117 (196–7 Chabot); Beihammer 2000a: no. 108, pp. 136–8; Kaegi 2003c: 253.

⁶⁵ Al-Mālikī, *Riyād* 18; Idris 1969: 128, c. 20; al-Nuwayrī, *Nihāya* xxiv: 13–16.

is, a Christian who acted as an advisor to the Muslim commander 'Abd Allāh b. Sa'd b. Abī Sarḥ. He may well have come from Egypt, where he may have witnessed Byzantine tactics, but possibly he was a Christian (or former Christian) from Cyrenaica or from Tripolitania. It is uncertain whether any Copts served as allies of the Muslims in actual combat, but the Muslims probably brought some with them from Egypt as interpreters, and the function of interpreter could quickly evolve on occasion into one of counselor.⁶⁶ Sources do not report whether Gregory's forces possessed any advisors or interpreters who could help with dealing with Muslims, or who knew much about Muslim ways of warfare. Allegations of Coptic collaboration with Muslims are late and questionable; they may be retrospectively imagined alignments.

Ibn al-Athīr, a late Muslim historical compiler who was not North African, offers an account somewhat similar to that of the Maghribi al-Mālikī but he identifies a very different adviser to the Muslim commander. According to him, it was Ibn al-Zubayr⁶⁷ who persuaded 'Abd Allāh b. Sa'd b. Abī Sarḥ to seek a decisive battle, because the Muslims otherwise were at risk and overextended. Ibn al-Zubayr advised him to leave some high quality troops to guard the horses and camp, and to wear down Gregory's Roman-Byzantine soldiers with protracted combat during the day, and then make a sudden attack. This strategy worked. The Muslims persisted in dragging out the fighting when Gregory's forces sought to withdraw out of fatigue, then the Muslims made a sudden and decisive attack with fresh troops. The Muslims pretended to return to their camp and then suddenly attacked the Byzantines and their African allies with great energy and success. This unconventional practice diverges from the standard preference for some kind of aggressive assault at dawn. Both accounts agree that the decisive Muslim attack took place late in the day (when shadows were two spears long, therefore about an hour or less before sundown).⁶⁸ Ibn al-Athīr specifies that the battle took place a day and a night distant from Sbeitla, apparently in the direction of what was to become Qayrawān.⁶⁹ The intense heat of the day identifies the season

⁶⁶ Clackson 2004: esp. 21–4.

⁶⁷ A prominent Qurayshite, who was son of Zubayr, the nephew of Muḥammad's first wife, Khadija, and of Asmā', daughter of Abū Bakr and sister of Muḥammad's third wife, 'Ā'isha.

⁶⁸ Byzantine spears typically were 3.6 meters in length, but Muslim ones may have varied. H. Elton, "Military Forces," *CHGRW* 288. No relevant details in Nicolle 1997.

⁶⁹ Ibn al-Athīr, *Kāmil* III: 89; E. Fagnan trans., "Annales du Maghreb et de l'Espagne," *Revue Africaine* 40 (1896): 358–9. Also al-Nuwayrī, *Nihāya* XXIV: 12, location of battle; advice of Ibn al-Zubayr: al-Nuwayrī, *Nihāya* XXIV: 15–17.

as summer.⁷⁰ The sources provide a rough idea of the tactics in the battle, although allegations about combat around the city walls are probably literary exaggerations, at best magnifying some later clashes around fortified (walled up) old Roman structures at Sbeitla. This was a victory accomplished through breaking the equilibrium of Gregory's men, reportedly with a consciousness that it was in the interest of the Muslims to lure the Roman-Byzantine forces into decisive combat, which occurred, instead of waiting out an indecisive protracted war of attrition. Muslim numbers were limited as were their supplies and mounts. Their strategy succeeded beyond their best hopes. Many of Gregory's best troops perished. They do not seem to have been captured and later released or redeemed as prisoners.

Al-Mālikī's narrative transmits traditions that celebrate the contribution of 'Abd Allāh b. al-Zubayr to the Muslim victory at Sbeitla. It is Ibn al-Zubayr who wisely advised 'Abd Allāh b. Sa'd b. Abī Sarḥ how to devise the successful strategy and tactics for the engagement with the Byzantines. It is he who slew the Roman leader Gregory, and it is he whom 'Abd Allāh b. Sa'd b. Abī Sarḥ sent to report the triumph to Caliph 'Uthmān. This celebration of Ibn al-Zubayr may derive from historical facts, or it may reflect Zubayrid propaganda about the second civil war, or even later 'Abbāsīd-era or other efforts to tarnish the memory of 'Amr and Mu'āwiya and their policies and networks.

It was Emperor Heraclius himself who in the 630s had vainly warned his commanders against succumbing to Arab ambushes, which is precisely what happened in the Syrian campaign that culminated at the Yarmūk. The so-called battle of Sbeitla did not involve a locality with the gorge-ribbed terrain comparable to that unique topography at the Yarmūk, but again Muslims managed to lure Byzantines into ambushes that disoriented them, broke up their formations and cohesion, and created a dynamic that resulted in their destruction. Sbeitla and Yarmūk have some tactical similarities, and both were decisive. Yet after Sbeitla, unlike the situation in Syria after Yarmūk, many years of fighting remained before Byzantine authority vanished in North Africa. Sbeitla was an early test but it was not the end of organized armed resistance to the Muslims in North Africa.

It does not appear that the Byzantine forces of Gregory had learned much from the earlier Byzantine defeats in the east at the hands of Muslims. But Gregory was trying to wage war independently, without

⁷⁰ al-Nuwayrī, *Nihāya* xxiv: 13–16.

the alliance with Constantinople. He had placed himself in an almost impossible situation.

The vague elements of the battle account given by the Muslim narrators al-Mālikī and Ibn al-Athīr (or their sources) are not improbable, despite the exaggerated focus on the role of Ibn al-Zubayr.⁷¹ This bears some similarity to what happened in experiences of early Byzantine combats with Muslim Arabs in Syria–Palestine: ambushes.⁷² The Muslims' well-crafted ambushes apparently broke up Gregory's forces and caused their flight. The mention of ambushes implies that the fighting covered a somewhat wide span of territory, that it was not confined to some small battlefield action.

INSIGHTS FROM THE *STRATEGIKON*

Formations were, as the contemporary (c. 600) Byzantine military manual the *Strategikon* of Maurice testifies, the foundation for standard Byzantine procedures for combat.⁷³ Hitherto there has not been discussion or analysis of the possible relevance of the description of the African drill or other drills by the author of the *Strategikon* for understanding Byzantine military campaigning in North Africa in the late sixth and seventh centuries. Although a few lines in the *Strategikon* cannot solve the mysteries of Byzantine North Africa, the text does deserve some investigation and reflection. The *Strategikon* helps to elucidate Byzantine military formations and maneuvers against the Sasānian Persians in 627 and against the Muslims in the battle of the Yarmūk in 636 as well as a drill for a military parade that was performed in the 630s. Romans and Byzantines maintained their military traditions longer than scholars have assumed in other regions.⁷⁴ It is likely that such traditions remained alive in North Africa as well in the seventh century. The *Strategikon* deserves consideration for possible information of assistance in understanding potential seventh-century operations and preparations

⁷¹ Al-Harthamī, Abū Sa'īd al-Shā'rānī, *Mukhtaṣar siyāsat al-ḥurūb*, ed. 'Arif Aḥmad 'Abd al-Ghani (Damascus: 1995): 33, for description of formations in roughly the same period in the east. Brief broader discussion of Muslim battle tactics in the late seventh century: Kennedy 2001: 23–4.

⁷² Even though the Byzantine military manual advised constructing ambushes against foes and warned against falling prey to ambushes: Rance 1994: 185–96.

⁷³ Maurice, *Das Strategikon des Maurikios*, ed. G. T. Dennis, trans. E. Gamišscheg (Vienna: 1981), 6. 1–3.

⁷⁴ Syvānne 2004: 427.

of Byzantine military forces in North Africa, whether in Byzacena or Numidia or elsewhere.⁷⁵

However there were a number of possible tactical formations. At Sbeitla they did not work for the Byzantines and Romano-Africans. The *Strategikon* of Maurice, which appears to have been written in Greek either by or with the encouragement of Emperor Maurice (582–602), provides some neglected information that may illuminate the practice of war in North Africa around 600 CE.⁷⁶ For complex reasons, no critical edition of the original Greek text appeared until the second half of the twentieth century. Charles Diehl consulted the seventeenth-century edition in writing his *Afrique Byzantine*, even though a copy was very difficult to obtain and examine in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century.⁷⁷ But Diehl said little about it. Other specialists on North Africa seldom consulted it for Byzantine military tactics in North Africa. The author of the *Strategikon* offers advice on how to prepare for war. He describes a maneuver that he says remains in use up to his day, that is, the beginning of the seventh century. He refers to the so-called “African drill” [Περὶ Ἀφρικανῆς γυμνασίας σχηματικῆς], which he compares with so-called Scythian, Alanic, Italian, and Illyrian drills. However the African drill probably was not the formation that Gregory’s forces utilized near Sbeitla. The author of the *Strategikon* explains that the African drill involves forming the soldiers in three units in a single line, with the reserve *defensores* concentrated at the center, who should stay in the rear during the process of the maneuver, and two flanking formations of mounted attackers. The *defensores* were to constitute a rearguard, while the two flanking units moved forward in pursuit or attack as troops with their mounts. If it were necessary or desirable for these two wings to turn back, in this drill first one wing withdrew back toward the rearguard, and only then did the other wing follow. The two wings then closed ranks. The author of the *Strategikon* explains:

⁷⁵ Kaegi 1995: 123–7; Kaegi, 2003c: 161, 163, 167; Kaegi 1975: 64–5. Of course it could also explain some sixth-century Byzantine military operations in North Africa, including in Numidia.

⁷⁶ Zuckerman 2004: 1: 165. Identification accepted by Syv anne 2004: 16–7; Rance 1994: 27–42.

⁷⁷ A rare 1664 edition by J. Scheffer in Sweden was the sole printed version of the Greek text until new critical editions appeared in the 1970s and 1980s. Therefore the basic nineteenth- and early twentieth-century historical superstructure of research on Byzantine North Africa developed with most specialists having difficult access to the *Strategikon*. The passage in *Strategikon* 6.3 accordingly was neglected. In his investigation of the text, Aussaresses 1909: 81 omitted in his translation or discussion of his section on the African drill the important phrase in the Greek text ὡς καὶ μέχρι καὶ νῦν ἦν “which has been the usual practice until the present.” Diehl 1896: p. ix cites the volume in his bibliography.

In the African system the troops are drawn up in one battle line, which has been the usual practice until the present. The middle moira is composed of defenders, both wings of assault troops. In picking up speed, as though in pursuit, the center moira drops behind a bit maintaining its close-order formation, while the assault troops on both flanks begin to move out. Then, when it is time to turn back, one moira stays in position or slows down on the outside, while the other races back to the defenders. The wing which had halted then starts moving back to the main line; the other wing moves quickly to meet it, riding off to one side, and in this way the two wings come face to face, but without colliding.⁷⁸

This African drill of the *Strategikon* seems to be a logical one, but in fact it was probably very difficult to execute, especially under the pressures and threat of hostile action. This complicated drill involved two wings of cavalry who served as mobile pursuit or attack troops and a middle moira or section of *defensores*. The two wings proceeded ahead while the middle unit remained in the rear, in defensive mode. When it was time to retire or withdraw, first one of the two wings would turn and return to join the rear unit, and only then would the other wing follow. The two wings would seek to form a constant front. This seems to be a risky maneuver, for dangerous gaps between the units could appear. This drill appears to have been designed for open country, namely in Byzacena (Byzantium) and Numidia, but would have been difficult to execute under stressful conditions of combat. It would have been easy for mix-ups to occur.⁷⁹

The specific exercise was suitable for maneuver of mounted units on level terrain in North Africa, whether in Byzacena (Byzantium) or even Numidia. During the interval of the return of the assault wings toward the rear there were times when those units were separated and were exposed to potential attacks by their foes. No explicit evidence exists concerning which precise maneuver or maneuvers Gregory and his forces sought to use during the battle at or near Sbeitla. No detailed narrative of the battle exists. But drills in the *Strategikon* may help to explain the defeat of Gregory and his forces by the Muslims. The Muslims devised ambushes. The so-called African drill appears to have been a dangerous maneuver

⁷⁸ Maurice, *Strategikon* 6.3 (*Maurice's Strategikon* trans. Dennis: 62). Full text in Greek with German translation: *Strategikon*, 6.3 (Dennis and Gamillscheg): 220–1. Syväne 2004, offers a reinterpretation of military maneuvers in his exposition of his understanding of the *Strategikon*, whose author he believes to be Emperor Maurice. He makes many comments, some of which are very useful, others of which are uncritical and devoid of any relationship with relevant topography and historical context. He refers to the African drill without name as the "scattered formation" on p. 126. Rance 1994: 74–6, 172–5.

⁷⁹ On fluidity and unpredictability of mounted combat: Rance, sv. "Battle," *CHGRW* 368–9; Elton 2007: 377–81; Luttwak 2009: 283–303.

to execute against an opponent who was resorting to multiple ambushes, as the Muslims reportedly were on the Sbeitla campaign. The author of the *Strategikon* in fact warns of the hazards of using a single battle line in combat,⁸⁰ although he is also very aware of the problem of ambushes and advocated utilizing ambushes against opponents.⁸¹

One might object that this maneuver or drill may simply be an arbitrarily named exercise, a fanciful one that may not actually have originated in or been used in North Africa, despite its name. The author of the *Strategikon* maintains that it was used up to the present time, namely about a half-century before the actual campaign at Sbeitla.

One should consider the possible use of the African drill by Byzantine forces in other campaigning in North Africa, especially in Numidia north of the Aures.⁸² Its author describes other basic exercises and formations that normally utilized a double instead of the single line of combat troops for the African drill.⁸³

So what kind of formation did Gregory utilize? It is more probable that Gregory and his forces tried to use a different one, a double battle line in the campaign east of Sbeitla. Autochthonous (Mauri, Moors) troops formed one battle line and Latin and possibly Byzantine troops formed the other battle line. Considerable distance – sometimes a mile – could separate such lines and such formations could face ruin if the cavalry were ambushed.⁸⁴ Maurice's *Strategikon* prefers a double battle line.⁸⁵ The flight of the autochthonous troops, who probably formed the first or leading battle line, rendered the position of Gregory's forces untenable. According to Byzantine doctrine, as the *Strategikon* describes it, the general would occupy the center of the second line.⁸⁶ It appears that what happened was the first battle line dissolved and fled, leaving the second line with its general completely exposed. Annihilation ensued. This is far from certain but it is the most probable reconstruction of the battle.

No explicit evidence or documentation exists to prove that Gregory's forces utilized any of these maneuvers from the *Strategikon* at or near

⁸⁰ Maurice, *Strategikon* 2.1 (*Maurice's Strategikon* [Dennis]: 23–5; *Strategikon* [Dennis and Gamillscheg]: 110–17).

⁸¹ Maurice, *Strategikon* Book 4 (*Maurice's Strategikon* [Dennis]: 52–7; *Strategikon* [Dennis and Gamillscheg]: 192–207).

⁸² I am grateful for advice from Dr. Everett Wheeler of Duke University.

⁸³ Maurice, *Strategikon* Book 3 (Dennis: 35–51); Dennis and Gamillscheg: 146–91.

⁸⁴ Note comments of Syväanne 2004: 126–30.

⁸⁵ *Maurice's Strategikon* 2.1, (Dennis): 23–5; (Dennis and Gamillscheg): 210–17.

⁸⁶ *Maurice's Strategikon*, Book 3, see esp. 3.6–8 (Dennis: 41–4). Syväanne 2004: 151–2.

Sbeitla in the campaigning in 647. But organizers of ambushes in rough terrain could have taken advantage of Byzantino-African forces that attempted to resort to such an exercise. One wonders whether one of these formations was involved in the battle or operations around Sbeitla in Africa (Tunisia) in 647. That would help to explain how the ambushes by Muslims functioned. It also could give meaning to the Muslim traditions that the Byzantines would not fight in a formation because they feared the Muslims. This type of formation might be especially vulnerable if fighting became protracted. Exhausted troops would not easily perform well trying to follow this kind of formation. But we cannot be certain about this. Why do these drills have these ethnic or geographical appellations? Was the African one really used heavily in North Africa? Or was this an arbitrary name for a drill? No one has reflected on the possible relationship of any of these drills with military events in North Africa at the time of the Muslim conquest, or indeed with the earlier history of Byzantine military operations in North Africa. But the drills required careful preparation and tight coordination. The author of the military manual states that the African drill (he does not specify whether other drills with titles were still in current practice) was used up to his time. If so, it was the norm shortly before the start of Muslim invasions of North Africa. Yet some Muslim traditions claim that the Byzantines and any allies were too afraid of the Muslims to stick to tight discipline and thus to fight in close order. There is a puzzling discrepancy.

This combat involved craft on the part of the Muslims. Sheer numbers were not decisive, nor was there treachery on either side. The Muslims had a plan and followed it to success.⁸⁷ Gregory managed to convoke North African elites to resist. The Muslims pressured Gregory and his African elites to fight probably by ravaging the countryside to the extent that local elites believed that they had to act to save their property, livestock, and families. Gregory perished in combat, perhaps a victim in one of the ambushes as he tried to lead his soldiers. A battle line of Moors was blamed for fleeing and therefore causing the destruction of the African elite soldiers, who perhaps formed a second line or group of wings, whom the fleeing autochthonous forces left exposed to destruction at the hands of the Muslims. Local Romano-Africans, especially from elite ranks, probably are the source of the tradition that blames the Moors for the military disaster.

⁸⁷ According to Ibn 'Abd al-Ḥakam, Ibn al-Athīr, and al-Mālīkī, in the cited passages.

The most contemporary reference, however brief, to conditions in North Africa at the moment of initial Muslim penetrations is that of the Frankish historian Fredegarius, for he supposedly wrote in about 660, little more than a decade after the death of Gregory. Fredegarius' source stressed the destructiveness of the Muslim expedition. By Africa Fredegarius is referring presumably primarily, if vaguely, to Africa Proconsularis. Fredegarius' reference testifies to the shock effect of the Muslim victory and the death of Gregory on the other side of the Mediterranean.

HYPOTHESES ABOUT THE LOCATION OF THE BATTLE

The Egyptian Muslim historian Ibn 'Abd al-Hakam (803-71) does not specify the location of the battle, which his slightly earlier contemporary Khalifa b. Khayyāt al-'Uṣfurī (777-854) as well as some later Muslim narrators place at or somewhere near Sbeitla.⁸⁸ Al-Balādhurī *Futūḥ al-buldān* identifies the location as 'Aqūba, which is otherwise unknown, except identified by later sources as reportedly a day and a half from Sbeitla.⁸⁹ The Christian Arab historian Agapius of Membij, who is often uninformed and erroneous in details given his own location (and that of his sources) in northern Syria, as is Michael the Syrian, claims that Gregory escaped with his life and made his way to Constantinople.⁹⁰ His account is suspect. It is impossible to understand other tactical details, except that the battle took place apparently outside of the city of Sbeitla,⁹¹ and probably to the east of it. Khalifa b. Khayyāt al-'Uṣfurī gives no copious narrative of North African history, but does however specify that the battle took place some seventy miles from Qayrawān in the direction of Sbeitla.⁹² The later compiler Ibn al-Athīr states that the battle took place a day and a half from Sbeitla.⁹³

⁸⁸ Ibn 'Abd al-Hakam, *Futūḥ Miṣr* (Torrey): 183; Khalifa b. Khayyāt, *Ta'rikh*, 92.

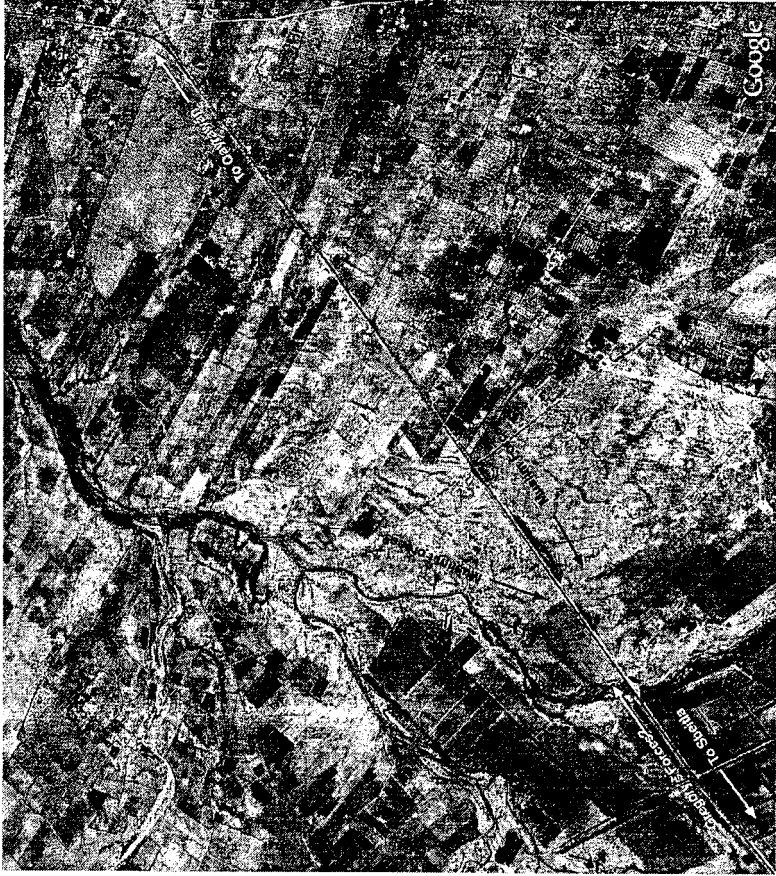
⁸⁹ Al-Balādhurī, *Futūḥ*; Ibn al-Athīr, *al-Kāmil*; al-Nuwayrī, *Nihāya* xxiv: 12.

⁹⁰ Common Syrian source for these traditions of the survival of Gregory: Hoyland 1997: 643; cf. Michael the Syrian, *Chronique* (Chabot) III: 440-1. Agapius, *Kitāb al-'Unwān*, PO 8: 479 [219].

⁹¹ N. Duval 1971: 399-400 queries Sbeitla as the site of the battle. But N. Duval did not investigate the accounts of Khalifa b. Khayyāt al-'Uṣfurī or Ibn 'Idhārī or of al-Mālikī (Idris 1964, 1969, for example). Y. Duval 1995: 131 locates the death of Gregory near Sbeitla or Sufetula. The lack of actual walls at Sbeitla may be unimportant; Muslim narrators can refer to the fortifications sheathing the Capitolium as city walls. But the location of the combat could be some distance away.

⁹² Khalifa b. Khayyāt, *Ta'rikh* 92.

⁹³ Ibn al-Athīr, *Kāmil* III: 89; ed. Tornberg III: 69. Marmajana is Henchir Guenara on the W. Harhob northwest of Hadjeb al-Aïoun; Solignac 1952: 157-8.



Map 7 Google Earth Pro view of possible site of Battle of "Sbeitla"
Scale c. 1 : 41,000. Accessed 9/24/09

One modern hypothesis for the location is east of Sbiba, on the modern P3 road between Sbeitla and modern Qayrawān, perhaps thirty to sixty kilometers distant from Sbeitla, at a spot maybe halfway between Sbeitla and a site named Marazana, Marmajana, or Marjana (see Map 7).⁹⁴ A visual examination of the terrain along the road between thirty to sixty kilometers eastward from Sbeitla reveals rolling landscape with some low elevations, especially to the north and south of the road between Sbeitla and Qayrawān, and countryside otherwise grooved with some gullies and rises and often covered with considerable patches of vegetation (brush, occasional patches of trees) that would be highly favorable for ambushes.⁹⁵ Satellite photos and old French military maps show that gullies and wādīs also increase to the north. How much vegetation existed there in the seventh century is unknown. But this is no flat plain; it differs from the level landscape that surrounds Qayrawān. It is impossible from extant literary narratives and visual observation (and there is no conclusive archaeological trace of the battle) to pinpoint any specific places where ambushes took place. Combats probably spread over some distance, perhaps several kilometers. The Muslims threatened Gregory and Sbeitla by approaching from the east, after arriving from the direction of Gabes (which they had bypassed) and the southeast. They lured Gregory's units into pursuing them and then sprang their ambushes and counterattacks very late in the afternoon. The land around Sbeitla is agriculturally productive today and presumably was productive then. Numbers of combatants are unknown although 'Abd Allāh b. Sa'd b. Abī Sarḥ was reported to have led some 20,000 soldiers at the start of the expedition.

The Byzantines may have pursued the Muslims in the direction of what was to become Qayrawān in an effort to prevent the Muslims from cutting Byzantine communications between Sbeitla and Byzantine-held coastal towns to the east. No explicit source gives such an explanation but the Byzantines, more than their autochthonous allies, may

⁹⁴ Benabbès 2004: 218–24.

⁹⁵ Visual examination made on July 12, August 22, and September 3, 2005. Invaluable are French Army (Service Géographique) maps from 1927–1940s, esp. Sheets LXXXV Sbeitla, LXXVII Djebel Mrhila, LXXVIII Hadjeb el Aïoun, LXX Djebel Trozza, and LXIII Kairouan. Most valuable is the sheet Hadjeb el Aïoun on terrain a little west of that town. Sheets 11 and 14 of the US Army Map Service, Tunisia, and Great Britain, Geographical Section, General Staff, 1942 (scale 1: 200,000), which were developed from French maps of 1930 and 1934 respectively, describe the landscape, vegetation, and contours that prevailed in that region before World War II although those cannot explain reliably the situation in the seventh century.

have wanted to open up communications with the coast to avoid isolation or even entrapment in the vicinity of Sbeitla by infestations of Muslim raiders.

CONSEQUENCES: HUMILIATING TERMS
AND SHATTERING OF THE BYZANTINE MYTH

All agree that the Muslims then successfully imposed a substantial monetary payment (up to 300 centenaria of gold)⁹⁶ on the surviving North African population, but disagree on the amount: according to one tradition each Muslim received a high amount of booty, 1,000 dinars or gold pieces for each infantryman and 3,000 for each horseman. Narrators also report that Muslims consented to withdraw from Byzantine North Africa after payment of that high tribute by locals. The agreement, which probably involved a treaty, dates to 648 CE.

It was not only the military defeat at or near Sbeitla, but also the ensuing twelve or fifteen months of devastating raids by the Muslims that convinced the local Romano-African elites to consent to payment of humiliating and expensive tribute to the Muslims. Despite the normal imperial disapproval and opposition to local arrangements with Muslims, a locally negotiated deal may be the explanation. However this is speculation. Sources do not specify the duration or the exact date. The agreement was made a little more than a year after the clash at or near Sbeitla, for 'Abd Allāh b. Sa'd b. Abī Sarḥ reportedly stayed in North Africa a year and two months (or fifteen months according to the less reliable and later al-Nuwayrī) before evacuating.⁹⁷ For fourteen or fifteen months the Muslims systematically wrought devastation on the rural life and property and livestock of Byzacena and North Africa until local inhabitants and their leaders reached expensive terms with the Muslim leadership. The severe damage to life and property underscores the significance of the clash. The myth of superior Byzantine and Roman discipline in battle had been definitively shattered. Local authorities and elites were prostrate, and were unable to raise another effective force that could eject the occupiers and raiders. The Romano-African signatories appear to have been

⁹⁶ Al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh* 1: 2818, citing al-Wāqidi as his source, specifies the total tribute as 300 qintārs of gold, or a total of 2,520,000 dinars. R. S. Humphreys, the translator of al-Ṭabarī, vol. xv, *The Crisis of the Early Caliphate*, 1990: n. 40, p. 23, points to "the legendary character of this narrative." At a far later date Ibn Khaldūn, *Tārīkh* 1v: 222, also specifies the total tribute as 300 qintārs of gold.

⁹⁷ Fourteen months: al-Mālikī, *Riyāḍ*, 27. Fifteen months: al-Nuwayrī, *Nihāya* xxiv: 18.

prominent local inhabitants of the provinces of Zeugitana (Africa) and Byzacena, but their numbers and identities and their precise places of origin and the role, if any, of Byzantine authorities are unknown. The distant imperial authorities were facing a fait accompli, for matters had developed or unraveled beyond their ability to control or shape them.

CHAPTER 7

Options for offensives and resistance

The defeat and death of the imperial usurper and former governor or exarch of Africa Gregory and his forces at Sbeitla (Sufetula) at the hands of Muslims in 647 indicated that it was difficult if not impossible for the Romano-Africans themselves alone to halt, let alone to defeat, the Muslims. But not every North African may have drawn that conclusion. The shock and embarrassment of Sbeitla redounded to the disgraced reputation of the dead usurper and his supporters, not so much to the reigning Emperor Constans II in Constantinople. Roman and Byzantine prestige had suffered a major reverse, but the empire had managed to recover from earlier seemingly disastrous defeats. The local rebellion in North Africa ended after 647 but not the restiveness and discontent of the Romano-African population. Defeat at the hands of the Muslims did not eliminate local grievances against the imperial government in Constantinople and its local representatives in Carthage. But the military and political challenge remained.

Gregory's fate, namely, total defeat and his own death, did not encourage Byzantines and North Africans to seek more battle. Instead it left them leaderless and led them to adopt a strategy of passivity, caution, and a preference to try to wait out Muslim raids behind fixed fortifications, or failing that, to seek to negotiate a truce for payment of tribute. This seems to have been the basic Byzantine and the basic North African strategy in North Africa from the loss of Egypt until the second and final fall of Carthage to the Muslims in 698. It may well have been the best policy to follow under the circumstances. But the Muslims did not continue to occupy Sbeitla and the strategic surrounding countryside for an interval in the years that immediately followed 648. There may even have been a hope on the part of some North Africans that the Muslim tide would somehow abate and recede and permit the old North African *Romanitas* to recover, not unlike some abortive hopes by

others for some kind of vague renewal in the Levant in the face of the initial Islamic conquests.¹

Affairs were in a shambles. From the perspective of the Merovingian narrator Fredegarius, who was writing sometime in the late seventh century or start of the eighth, all of Africa was ravaged and occupied speedily by those he (or his source) called the Saracens.² Fredegarius offered no details about the death of Gregory and his troops. Muslim narratives indicate that it was the local inhabitants or more precisely their elites, not any imperial authorities, who somehow arranged terms with the Muslims and paid the costly tribute. It took time to regroup and make sense out of things. Gregory had left no plans for any succession to himself. The Muslim victory surprised the local inhabitants in North Africa as much as imperial counselors who were making decisions in Constantinople. The Emperor Constans II at the time was an immature sixteen-year-old who still depended on advisers and powerful generals and was in any case far away and unable to react or to offer swift help. The priority for his advisers was saving Anatolia, not North Africa. Both Muslims and Byzantines faced the challenges of overextended logistical lines from their respective centers of power in the east.

LAPSE AND RESTORATION OF BYZANTINE AUTHORITY IN NORTH AFRICA 647-65

An interval existed in North Africa between the death of Gregory at or near Sbeitla and the restoration of any kind of normal Byzantine authority. This of course gave the Muslims under their victorious commander 'Abd Allāh b. Sa'd b. Abī Sarḥ the opportunity to raid and enslave almost with impunity. It took time to fill the vacuum in Byzantine authority. That gap, which lasted at least two years, until 649 at a minimum, resulted from the combat at or near Sbeitla. No one succeeded Gregory automatically as leader of the rebellion against Constantinople. He had not anticipated the need for planning any kind of succession. The survivors among Gregory's rebels lost prestige with the decisive victory of the Muslims at Sbeitla. The imperial government, which also lost prestige even though it was not directly engaged, had not been expecting this course of events. It took time to react and fill the dangerous vacuum. The open local rebellion against imperial authority ceased, but some North Africans' discontent with

¹ On such hopes in the Levant, Kaegi 1995:150, 157-9, 178-80.

² Fredegarius, *Chron.* 81, 162 (Krusch): 162; (Devillers and Meyers): 182-3.

imperial policies both fiscal and ecclesiastical persisted. Precisely how and exactly when imperial authority was reestablished and the extent to which any restored authority was effective, is unknown and controversial. It took time to decide who had the authority to make any decisions at all, for local defense or for negotiations with the Muslims. Any decisions in principle needed to be approved by the imperial government. Issues of military funding demanded swift solutions. There indubitably were recriminations concerning the responsibility for the abortive rebellion, military defeat, and liability for resulting damages.³ Facts on the ground ultimately drove decision-making.

Constans II's proclamation of the *Typos* in 648, an edict that forbade further public debate of Christology, failed to quell ecclesiastical dissent in North Africa and elsewhere.⁴

The details are unclear with respect to the following years. The Byzantine coinage from the Carthage mint continued to proclaim Constans II and then his successors Constantine IV and Justinian II as emperors, without any hint of local autonomy (unless one wishes to interpret the *PAX* issue differently from the interpretation given below). But the Carthage mint struck no coins, apparently, for Justinian II's short-lived successors after his overthrow at Constantinople in 695. Constans II and his advisors appointed an Armenian, Narseh Kamsarakan, to govern what remained of Byzantine Tripolitania in the 650s, indicating some imperial ability to appoint officials from and loyal to Constantinople, even though that situation cannot have endured very long.⁵ No one else arrogated the title of emperor in North Africa. The Carthaginian mint proclaimed the emperor who was in Constantinople as emperor in North Africa. It is an exaggeration to claim that North Africa after the rebellion of Gregory remained autonomous. Here there is a matter of terminology. Among the key issues is the identity of those who were making important political and military decisions on the ground in North Africa and what their basis was for power and how they reached and implemented their decisions. Some constituencies in Africa probably wished that autonomy was the reality for themselves, but the formal evidence indicates that nominally Constans II remained emperor for North Africa's Romanized population even though he and his officials encountered stiff opposition to his efforts to raise more taxes. The *Liber Pontificalis* speaks of discontent in North Africa with the

³ Broader perspectives: Olster 2006: 46–71. ⁴ Hovorun 2008: 81–4.

⁵ *The Geography of Ananias of Shirak*, ed. and trans. R. Hewsen (TAVO 1992), but analyzed by Zuckerman 2002a: 169–75. Also Zuckerman, 2002b: 261–3.

emperor's fiscal policies, including new poll taxes, but does not use terminology to suggest any de facto local independence from the Byzantine Empire.⁶ But an ugly mess existed that needed cleaning up, followed by a sorting out of priorities and some kind of reconciliation of diverse constituencies within North Africa.

Somehow imperial and local authorities restored some kind of mutual arrangements in North Africa after 647, at least at Carthage and adjacent coastal areas, and especially after the westward journey of Emperor Constans II in 663.⁷ The evidence for that is not only the numismatic fact of the production of the Carthaginian mint in the name of Constans II and then Constantine IV and even Justinian II,⁸ but also the existence of another official act: the appointment of Narseh to govern what remained of Byzantine Tripolitania in the 650s or early 660s.⁹

More important yet is the testimony of the *Liber Pontificalis* that troops from Byzantine Africa cooperated with other Byzantine troops in suppressing the abortive rebellion of the commander Mizizios in Sicily in 669, after the assassination of Constans II.¹⁰ That forceful demonstration of soldierly loyalty to the continuity of the imperial succession does not mean that there was any absolute Byzantine imperial control in the African, let alone Numidian, countryside, anymore than there was in Byzantine Italy, Sicily, and Sardinia, but it does demonstrate a propensity of the mobile troops in North Africa, that is the best Roman military forces, to support the emperor who sat on the throne in Constantinople. Local wishes and interests may have limited imperial ability to enforce certain policies in North Africa, but the elite mobile military forces of Byzantine Africa remained loyal to Constantinople at a decisive moment: 669. The ability of loyal troops from Africa to participate in an operation to suppress rebellion in Sicily indicates that the North African troops in question probably came from the vicinity of Carthage or nearby North African ports. It would have been imperative to use the Byzantine units that were able to move most quickly in order to put down the revolt. Speed was essential. But given that these troops came from the coastal regions, no firm evidence exists on the extent to which the imperial government controlled

⁶ *Liber Pontificalis*, ed. L. Duchesne (1886–1957; repr. Paris: 1981): 1: 344. Paulus Diaconus, *Historia Langobardorum* 5, 11 *MGH SRL* [Hanover: 1878] 191). *Contra*, Mansouri 2004: 785–7. Mansouri ignores the *Liber Pontificalis* and its information with respect to this issue.

⁷ The plausible cautious conclusion of Benabbès 2004: 237–41.

⁸ Morrisson and Kampmann 1979: 515–16.

⁹ Zuckerman 2002a: 169–75.

¹⁰ *Liber Pontificalis* (Duchesne): 1: 346. Paulus Diaconus, *Historia Langobardorum* 5, 12 (*MGH SRL* 191); sv. "Mizizios," no. 5163, *PMBZ* 3: 312–13.

significant military forces in the African and Numidian interior. Nor is it certain how long after the suppression of the usurper Mizizios' revolt in 669 in Sicily any Byzantine troops in North Africa still remained loyal to the central government. But the incident demonstrates the readiness of some Byzantine troops from North Africa to engage in effective military measures to put down centrifugal tendencies. Otherwise they would have profited from Mizizios' revolt and gained more autonomy and privileges; instead they took decisive military action to suppress any unraveling of the empire.

A fourth and final conclusive and explicit testimony to the restoration of Byzantine authority, but with an implicit recognition that the Byzantines had not controlled everything before, is the affirmation again of the compiler of the well-informed *Liber Pontificalis* with respect to the year 685: "the province of Africa was subjugated to and restored to the Roman [Byzantine] Empire" (*sed et provincia Africa subjugata est Romano imperio atque restaurata*).¹¹ The statement leaves many questions open. But in some sense, Byzantine authorities had regained political and military control of part of Byzantine Africa, in particular what had once been the province of Africa Proconsularis or Zeugitana. The information in the *Liber Pontificalis* cannot be ignored, but 685 is almost forty years after the battle at or near Sbeitla.

Nonetheless, the intervening gap and confusion and lapse of cohesive authority in Byzantine Africa after 647, two decades before the death of Constans II, worked in the favor of the Muslims. Sources are silent on the extent to which surviving autochthonous combatants in the clash at Sbeitla participated in the treaty of 648. After the combat at or near Sbeitla Muslims occupied the town of Sbeitla and pursued some fleeing Christians to the fortified points at and near Gafsa, including fortified points outside of Gafsa, and Thysdrus (modern El Djem, with its huge and fortified Roman amphitheater).¹²

The fame of the clash at or near Sbeitla testifies to the shock that the Muslim victory inflicted on Christian inhabitants of North Africa and correspondingly how greatly it encouraged Muslim morale and tempted Muslims to new expeditions. It created a dynamic and momentum. Christians had already been hearing of Muslim victories with apprehension. The death of Gregory and the heavy casualties of the Byzantine-African

¹¹ *Liber Pontificalis* Bk. 84, (Duchesne): I: 366.

¹² Al-Mālikī, *Riyāḍ* 21; El Djem: Ibn al-Athīr, *Kāmil* III: 91; also, al-Nuwayrī, *Nihāya* xxiv: 16. Slim 1980.

forces shattered whatever morale the local inhabitants still possessed. Yet the next Muslim expeditions did not take place immediately after their victory of 647 in the vicinity of Sbeitla. Presumably Byzantines and North Africans required some time to adjust and to rearrange governmental and military affairs after their defeat in 647. Particulars do not exist.

The Byzantines attempted to use their naval strength to make raids against Muslim-controlled North Africa, even briefly reoccupying the Barqa region in Cyrenaica, although Barqa is slightly removed (a day or two's journey) from the Mediterranean coast. The Byzantines' ability to conduct major coastal raids in principle could have severed or threatened to sever Muslim communication between Egypt and any Muslim outposts in the west. Such posts were vulnerable to raids from the sea. Yet the Byzantine navy of the time was not invulnerable.¹³ Muslim victory in North Africa at or near Sbeitla in 647 CE was the supposed catalyst for stepped-up Byzantine naval activity in the eastern Mediterranean. A Muslim tradition maintains that Constans II assembled his ill-fated naval force to sail out against the Muslims off the southern and western coasts of Anatolia "because of what the Muslims had done to them [that is, the Byzantines] in Africa."¹⁴ By 654 or 655 CE the Muslims won a very major naval victory over the Byzantines at the so-called Battle of the Masts or Battle of Phoenix in the eastern Mediterranean (off the Lycian coast, in southwestern Anatolia).¹⁵ Sebeos crafted a narrative in which he depicts Constans II reacting in terror and contrition to an insulting letter from Mu'awiya that accompanied the abortive Muslim naval expedition and land probe against Constantinople of 654/5 after that Muslim naval victory over the Byzantines: "The king [Constans II] received the letter, went into the house of God, fell on his face and said 'See Lord, the insults which these Hagarenes have inflicted upon you ... He lifted the crown from his head, stripped off his purple robes and put on sackcloth, sat on ashes, and ordered a fast to be proclaimed in Constantinople in the manner of Nineveh."¹⁶ This was a traumatic experience for Constans II, but the failure of that early Muslim probe against Constantinople revived his spirits and probably those of some of his subjects.

¹³ There needs to be more study of it. Salvatore Cosentino and, separately, Vassilios Christides promise to make such investigations.

¹⁴ Al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh* 1: 2867 = vol. xv, *The Crisis of the Early Caliphate* trans. R. S. Humphreys, 1990: 74. Quotation is from Humphreys translation.

¹⁵ Eickhoff 1966: 18–21; Fahmy 1954, repr. 1980: 98–105, Stratos 1980. A contrasting opinion: Zuckerman 2005: 114–17, who dates the battle to 654. See Cosentino 2007.

¹⁶ Sebeos, *Hist.* c. 50, 170 (145 Thomson); cf. precedent of Heraclius who received a very insulting letter from Khusro II: c. 38 [124] 80–1. Thomson 1999: 297; Greenwood 2002: 370.



Figure 4 Silver *PAX* issue. Constans II obverse, with *PAX* on reverse. Carthage Mint. Date 647 or shortly thereafter. *DO Cat* 2,2 no. 132.1. BZC 56.23.164.D2009. © Dumbarton Oaks, Byzantine Collection, Washington, DC.

PUZZLE OF THE *PAX* COINAGE

An inscription *PAX* (peace) on a Carthaginian silver coin issue of Emperor Constans II is alleged to reflect a temporary peace with the Muslims, but there are problems with such an ascription or with any allusion to over-coming internal strife (see Figure 4).¹⁷

If *PAX* refers to peace with Muslims, it commemorates it in Africa alone, which would involve the treaty or arrangements made after the death of Gregory. Possibly that was the issue to which Muslim commentators refer, rather than to Gregory the exarch himself, but that identification is very insecure as well.¹⁸ However it is most likely that there is another explanation: the *PAX* inscription celebrates the restoration of peace between Byzantine North Africa and the central Byzantine government in Constantinople after the defeat and death of Gregory.¹⁹ The

¹⁷ *Moneta Imperii Byzantini*, ed. W. Hahn (Vienna: 1973–81) 3: 134, Table 27, Constans II, Carthage, silver, no. 157a and 157b, silver. Grierson, *DO Cat* 2,2: 475, 476, nos. 132.1, 132.2, 132.3, 133. Grierson comment on p. 475n., “The obvious occasion was the defeat of the rebel Gregorius in 647 and the conclusion of peace with the Arab government in Egypt.” Hahn wonders whether it was issued for the 651 peace with Mu’āwiya in Syria, but none was struck in the east for the peace, so that makes little sense. It might possibly celebrate the selection of a new exarch after the elimination of Gregory, but one seldom celebrates or acknowledges internal strife in any fashion.

¹⁸ Intriguing Late Antique mosaic inscriptions with *PAX* exist in the museums of both Algiers and Tipasa, but they do not appear to shed light on this seventh-century coinage.

¹⁹ Such *PAX* issues were struck in the late fifth century to celebrate the restoration of relations between emperors in the west and in Constantinople, respective reigns of Leo I and Anthemius. See Kaegi 1968: 37–43. I thank Frank M. Clover of the University of Wisconsin/Madison for his comments on this matter. Significantly, that fifth-century *PAX* coinage also was issued in the west, and not at Constantinople, to demonstrate peaceful solidarity with the government at Constantinople. Letter of Philip Grierson to me, dated March 8, 1997, “the *PAX* refers to a local

Constantinopolitan mint did not strike a comparable coin. In some way the Carthaginian issue celebrates an event or condition that prevailed or related to North Africa. Agapius refers to a peace made with “the king,” that is, with Constans II, after the defeat of Gregory at Sufetula (Sbeitla), and it is probable that the *PAX* issue is referring to that peace, not to the peace with the Muslims.²⁰ There is no record of Byzantine coinage celebrating peace with barbarians in any other case. *PAX* on coinage for a peace treaty with barbarians had occurred uniquely far earlier in the reign of mid-third-century CE Roman Emperor Philip the Arab: *PAX FUNDATA CUM PERSIS*.²¹ But such an inscription about *Pax* is extremely rare on coinage in any Roman reign or period or region. That third-century numismatic exception has little or no relevance for seventh-century Byzantine Africa. The rare instances of *PAX* on Roman coinage mostly involve proclaiming or asserting, however inaccurately, the termination of internal Roman disputes or the celebration of conditions of the absence of civil war or civil strife.²²

NEEDED AND WANTED: HELP FROM BYZANTIUM

Counterfactual speculations offer themselves. What if General Peter had shifted his troops from Numidia to aid Byzantine defenses in Egypt versus the Muslims on the northern periphery of Egypt in 633? Would it have made any difference? Would it have snuffed out the Muslims in Palestine and Syria? This would be dangerous counterfactual speculation. The basic fact was the extremely overextended and tenuous grip of the Byzantines on North Africa and their government’s failure to conciliate different constituencies – the landowners, the small cultivators, the merchants, the townspeople, the autochthonous tribes, the ecclesiastics – into a motivated

‘peace’. Since no eastern mint celebrated that of 651 with Mu’awiya, it seems inconceivable that Carthage would have thought of doing so.” I wish to thank Dr. Callu and Professor L. Cracco-Ruggini for assistance.

²⁰ Agapius, *Kitāb al-‘Unwān*, ed. Vasiliev 1912: *PO* 8: 479. The only problem is this defective text also reports that after the defeat of Gregory he fled to “Rum,” which Vasiliev translates as “Greece,” and then “made peace with the king.” All other texts state that Gregory was slain at Sufetula and it is likely that was the case. Of course Agapius was located far from Africa anyway, in northern Syria, and not well informed on North Africa. He may be drawing on a manuscript tradition that derives from Theophilus of Edessa. On this Theophilus of Edessa, see the fundamental paper by Conrad 1990: repr. with different pagination in: Bonner 2005: 317–60. Agapius’ version accordingly deserves a skeptical reading.

²¹ *RIC* 4.3: 76, a unique coin struck at Antioch in the third-century reign of Emperor Philip the Arab to celebrate peace with Persia after his return from campaigning against Persians. Canepa 2009: 79 for additional discussion from an art historical perspective.

²² I have learned much from my University of Chicago colleague Emanuel Mayer.

and cohesive whole who would be willing to work together and fight together to preserve the empire in Africa. Byzantine sources in Greek indicate that some Arab (whether Muslim or not) raiding had already begun in Syria-Palestine by that early date and that it was endangering security in Byzantine Egypt.²³ Ibn 'Abd al-Ḥakam offers additional corroboratory information.²⁴ Byzantine naval strikes could not fundamentally change the military balance in North Africa without coordinated land operations as part of an overall strategy. Yet the Byzantine Empire's priorities were elsewhere and its resources were finite and already severely overstretched. If Constans II had survived in 669, for he was still relatively young, matters might have taken a different turn, but again, that option would involve the very considerable risks that are inherent in any counterfactual speculation.

The Romano-African and autochthonous populations needed the resources from overseas, and in the seventh century, that meant from Byzantium, because the polities in western Europe, and especially the Christians who resided in nearby Italy, were too divided and weak to be able to send any effective help within a reasonable space of time. The western European principalities and monarchies were preoccupied with their own problems. But there was a political challenge: encouragement and development of loyalties and a will to resist and a will to organize and to energize Romans in Africa. The defeat at Sbeitla did not mark the end of Byzantine Africa. Resistance in different forms continued another long half-century. References to a "Saracen" occupation of part of Sicily in 652-3, which reportedly was the cause for the abortive expedition of the Ravenna Exarch Olympius to Sicily, are doubtful, although the suggestion that Saracen is a copyist's error for the North African tribe Zarakenioi is even more doubtful and undocumented.²⁵

Byzantines even temporarily recovered control of some Tripolitanian towns in the 650s. Narseh Kamsarakan, a prominent Armenian, governed Tripolitanian coastal towns briefly (although precise dates cannot be determined) as a Byzantine official during the 650s or very early 660s, before the decisive Muslim campaigns in the province of Byzacena that took place between 665 and 668. His short-term appointment was another

²³ Nicephorus, *Short History*, c. 23 (Mango): 70-3, 189; Theophanes, *Chron.* AM 6126 (De Boor, I: 338; Mango and Scott 469-71); Michael the Syrian, *Chronique* (Chabot) II: 425; Agapius, *Kitāb al-'Unwān*, PO 8: 471-4.

²⁴ Ibn 'Abd al Ḥakam, *Futūḥ Miṣr* (Torrey): 53-4. Hoyland 1997: 574-90.

²⁵ Woods 2003a: 262-5. This conjecture is too far-fetched, but a "Saracen" occupation by 652 is also out of place. The issue needs more study.

example of Heraclian dynastic reliance on appointment of Armenians for many important positions.¹⁶

But the catastrophe of Gregory's defeat at Sbeitla indicates that the mere presence of a Byzantine or local North African leader close to the battlefield against the Muslims was no guarantee of success for defenders of Roman North Africa. Personal leadership and micromanagement could help but could not solve everything. There were risks to the leader and his advisers in engaging in battle.

It was never possible for the Byzantines to organize all of the resources of North Africa. The territory was huge and in principle contained the human and material resources to resist the Muslims. The challenge was one of organization, mobilization, coordination, morale, and willpower. But the Byzantines failed to tap the local manpower and technical abilities and financial resources to accomplish that. They could not overcome parochial perspectives and centrifugal tendencies in the diverse regions of North Africa. They failed to reach into the vast potential of the westernmost territories of North Africa. They also lacked the political skills to find a way to approach and negotiate with North Africans who might have been able to develop effective alliances and effective military resistance. They achieved this only to a very limited extent. It was instead the Muslims who succeeded better at achieving those means and objectives. It was impractical for the Byzantines to draw much on the substantial resources that existed in the far western regions of North Africa, where they had no effective control and little or no diplomatic or political influence.

It was impractical for the inhabitants of Byzantine North Africa to build an effective defense without the technical support, the fleet, and the diplomatic and military intelligence of the Byzantine Empire. Advice concerning what military measures were proving to be effective and ineffective against Muslims in north Syria and Anatolia would have been useful to those who were responsible for devising defenses of North Africa. For the empire, the support and confidence of North African inhabitants were essential. But the ecclesiastical politics, the crisis of the imperial legitimacy (Heraclian dynasty), fear of internal military unrest, fiscal pressure, and gaps between Greek and Latin culture, between Greeks, Latins, and autochthonous

¹⁶ See the analysis of the text of the *Geography* of Ananias of Shirak by Zuckerman 2002a. Also on the prominence of Armenians in Byzantine Africa, N. Duval, quoted in "Discussions" *AT* 10 (2002) 51. For inscription in early 640s left by prominent John dux of Tigisis, who identified himself as Armenian: *CIL* 8: 2389, 17822 = *Inscriptiones Latinae Christianae Veteres* 1832 (ed. E. Diehl, vol. 1, p. 361). Cf. a virtually contemporary sepulchral inscription from Ravenna of the exarch Isaac: Cosentino 1993: 23–4, Ἀρμένιος ἦν. Hodgkin 1967: vi: 168–70.

populations, and even the lengthy and tenuous communications evened their relations, and created impediments to any viable defense.

BYZANTINE INTERESTS

Heraclius' powerful treasurer (*sacellarius*) Philagrius had the opportunity to acquaint himself with the wealth of North Africa. Heraclius died in early 641, but he had already ordered Philagrius to make a new total tax survey of the empire.²⁷ During the bitter crisis of the imperial succession in 641 after Heraclius' death at Constantinople, Philagrius was exiled, by Martina's regency, to the port of Septem (Ceuta). During his brief exile at Septem he had the opportunity to acquaint himself better with the wealth and potential revenues of Africa. The fiscal consequences were probably heavy for North Africa. Heavy tax burdens were imposed, especially after the recall and return to Constantinople of Philagrius from exile. Philagrius again became *sacellarius*, although the duration of his term is unknown. This is the last known reference to effective Byzantine control of the strategic port of Septem in Mauretania II Tingitana. The precise date for the end of Byzantine control of Septem is unknown, but it was sometime after 641 and before 711. Already in the east and in Italy the Byzantine government had tried to seize the gold and silver from churches in a desperate effort to find funds to finance its emergency expenditures. Now it was the turn of North Africa, after 641. North Africa was a very important possession for Byzantium at that time. The Byzantines needed to defend Africa because of the important budgetary contribution of North African revenues. The empire depended even more in the seventh century than previously on any surplus from North Africa to help to fund its far-flung and pressing obligations.²⁸

The defense of Byzantine North Africa would be inconceivable without taking Byzantine strategic and economic interests and bases in Sicily, Italy, Sardinia, and the Balearic Islands into account.²⁹ Byzantine interests were

²⁷ Exile: Nicephorus, *Short History*, c. 30 (Mango 81); *Chronicle of John, Bishop of Nikiu* 120.23, 120.53, instead states that Philagrius was exiled to another African site, Tripoli (trans. Charles 191, 197). Census: Σύνοψις Χρονική, Μεσαιωνική Βιβλιοθήκη, ed. C. Sathas (Athens, Paris: 1894): VII: 110. Authenticity of census: Brandes 2002: 459–60. sv. "Philagrius 3" *PLRE* 3: 1018.

²⁸ See comment on earlier critical role of financial contributions from North Africa: Heather 2005: 281: "The revenue surplus from North Africa was essential for balancing the imperial books." His statement pertains to the situation in the late fourth and early fifth centuries, but it is at least equally valid for the seventh century; cf. Heather 2005: 272–7, 297–8, 396–7. Elton, "Military forces," *CHGRW* 309.

²⁹ Zucca 1998: 115, 140–1, 211–13.

maritime as well as terrestrial. This was still a huge yet unwieldy empire. Events and opportunities led the Muslims to widen their own objectives and means to take account of the broad scope of Byzantine defenses and strategic strongpoints. North Africa had strategic significance to protect Byzantine-controlled Sicily, Sardinia, southern Italy and key maritime routes in the Mediterranean. But North Africa lay at the extremity of the Byzantine Empire's capacity to project its power westward and provision its warships and transport ships and armies and to maintain secure and reasonable communications. The most vulnerable part of Byzantine North Africa was its eastern section, namely what is modern Tunisia, which foreign invaders had traditionally managed to invade and occupy since the era of the Carthaginians.

According to some traditions, after the decisive battle of the Yarmūk in 636 in the east, Emperor Heraclius ordered his troops everywhere (in particular, Levant, Egypt, Anatolia) to hold on to whatever they could but to avoid open battle against the Muslims.³⁰ He intended for this policy to apply primarily in western Asia. It was not initially developed for North Africa, but the Muslim conquest of Egypt soon made it relevant for North Africa. Meanwhile he and his immediate successors sought to develop a better and viable strategy and tactics in Anatolia. They lacked the funds, the manpower, and the confidence to undertake much warfare of open maneuver against the Muslims. But the tradeoff for such a policy was either paying tribute or risking the devastation of countryside and towns and the physical harm and captivity of many of the inhabitants.

In Byzantine territories in Syria, upper Mesopotamia, and Egypt in the comparable immediate post-Yarmūk years (post 636) local civilian authorities undertook negotiations with Muslims on their own initiative, but the Byzantine government in Constantinople sought to prevent such informal arrangements. Byzantine policy followed the same procedure in North Africa. It was consistent. Constantinople's leaders distrusted leaving discretion to local officials and ecclesiastics because such policies in the east had unfolded to the detriment and embarrassment of Byzantium. Constantinople tried to prevent any local initiatives for relations with the Muslims without explicit approval from the emperor or his immediate advisers.

³⁰ Michael the Syrian, *Chronique* (Chabot) 11: 424–5; Scher, *Histoire Nestorienne/Chronique de Séert*, PO 13: 626; Agapius, *Kitāb al-'Unwān*, PO 8: 471; Anonymous, *Chron. ad annum 1234 pertinens*, CSCO c. 117 (196–7 Chabot); Beihammer 2000a: no. 108, pp. 136–8; Kaegi 2003c: 253.

One normally acts and thinks in the light of one's most recent experiences when reaching political decisions. This is a risk-laden tendency to engage in extrapolation bias, or overreliance on the recent past to assess the future. For Constantinople that meant in the light of its experiences in two different sets of recent challenges. One thinks first of recent imperial lessons learned during the Muslim invasions in Syria, Palestine, Egypt, and upper Mesopotamia, where the imperial government found it expedient to oppose and reject local bartering with the Muslims. The Emperor Heraclius and his immediate successors sought to remove and punish any bureaucrats or ecclesiastics who engaged in such activities. They tried to replace them with more reliable persons. The same process took place a few years later in North Africa. Constantinople was very suspicious of anyone who made or might make unauthorized contacts with Muslims with or without financial encumbrances. The outcome was suspicion of treason against any governor or ecclesiastic who showed hesitation about any aspect whatever of imperial policy, whether civil or religious. But the imperial policy failed to take account of local realities in which local leaders found it to be necessary or pragmatic to communicate with Muslim commanders and other representatives of Muslim authorities for security and essential services.

But the recent past lay heavily on Byzantine decision-making in a second instance of extrapolation bias. The imperial government of Constans II at Constantinople looked at the abortive revolt of Gregory in the light of Heraclius' earlier successful revolt from Africa and subsequent military unrest in Italy. There was a desire to prevent anyone else from launching a successful rebellion from Africa. The arrest, trial, exile, and death of Maximus the Confessor failed to end unrest in North Africa among Catholic and Chalcedonian constituencies. There was probably an obsession with looking back to the history of rebellions in North Africa with a determination to forestall any successful new one, even though the Muslim threat was growing. There was a tendency to worry about what had happened in the recent past rather than anticipate and head off what was about to take place.

One eminent historian of early medieval Spain argues that only a limited area of North Africa was worth conquering:

a small number of discrete areas of relatively dense settlement and population, separated one from another by much larger stretches of marginal land, difficult to traverse, hard to control, and offering only limited economic benefit to those who attempted to do so. The pockets of relatively urbanized and cultivated territory consisted of the lower Nile valley and its delta, Cyrenaica, the Tunisian Sahel, and

the Tangiers peninsula. Simply put, these were the only areas worth conquering and trying to retain. The primary phases of the Arab conquest of northern Africa thus need to be seen as a continuing process of obtaining control over all of these areas in turn, and in securing communications between them.³¹

This opinion, however, reflects a decidedly European perspective. For those from more economically deprived regions, North Africa may not have seemed to be so forbidding, uninteresting, and threadbare.³²

The Sūs al-Aqṣā countryside in modern Morocco was and is agriculturally rich and yet does not make it onto the above list of desirable regions. Much of northeast Algeria, especially territory between the ports of Collo and Hippo Regius (modern Annaba, formerly Bône) and the Numidian provincial capital of Constantine, is fertile, emerald green in the springtime, and agriculturally productive. The Byzantines had revived old Roman strongholds such as Timgad, which enjoyed considerable Christian population and were not empty.³³ Tebessa was a well-fortified nodal point that dominated east–west movement through the Kasserine–Tebessa Gap through the mountains into the vulnerable plains of lower Numidia and opened the way to opportunities for expansion much further west.

UNREST AMONG LOCAL AND AUTOCHTHONOUS NORTH AFRICANS

Several local military revolts and conspiracies disturbed Byzantine efforts to develop a defense for Africa. The revolt of Gregory the “Exarch” or Governor General of Africa, who proclaimed himself emperor in 646/7 CE, unwittingly facilitated the progress of Muslims. Previous unrest among Byzantine commanders and units in Italy did not help matters. The Muslims’ brief threat to Constantinople and its environs immediately after their naval victory off the coast of southwestern Anatolia at the Battle of the Masts or Phoenix in 654 or 655 increased pressure.³⁴ Likewise Constans II was compelled to pay 1,000 solidi daily as tribute to the Muslims in Syria because of desperate circumstances.³⁵ Then in 661 CE or slightly later a local North African leader rebelled, then fled to the Caliph Muʿāwiyā, who became caliph in 661, in Damascus after African

³¹ Collins 2004: 121. ³² Geographical fundamentals: Abun-Nasr 1987: 5–25.

³³ Monceaux 1911: 49–53 on solid Christian communities at Timgad in the Byzantine era; Courtois 1951.

³⁴ O’Sullivan 2004; Cosentino 2007. ³⁵ Fredegarius, *Chron.*, 81.

provincials rejected his rebellion.³⁶ Another rebellion flared up against the Byzantine authorities in Sicily in 653, and yet another there in 669. On the eve of the greatest Muslim drive against the Byzantines in North Africa, some of the best remaining Byzantine soldiers in Africa were transferred to Sicily to put down a military revolt there against the Emperor Constans. The timing could not have been worse for the Byzantines. Such internal diversions complicated efforts to create a viable defense for North Africa and threatened communications with Constantinople. Suspicions resulting from such conspiracies and reports of more of them harmed the effort to devise effective North African defenses and distracted the imperial leadership at Constantinople. The conditions worsened not merely because of actual revolts but also because of growing suspicions and mistrust. The unhealthy situation exacerbated problems while military unrest in other parts of the Byzantine Empire increased strains.³⁷

Byzantine relations with the autochthonous North Africans were never good.³⁸ The Byzantines had treated autochthonous leaders treacherously for example, in 544, when they massacred many autochthonous invitees to a conference.³⁹ Probably some seventh-century autochthonous leaders still remembered reports about incidents from that difficult past. In order to raise troops to fight the Muslims, the Byzantines and local Latin Africans had to turn to autochthonous tribes, because Byzantium could ill afford to send troops from its beleaguered territories in Italy, the Balkans, or Anatolia, where they concentrated their best forces. Many modern North Africans doubt that the Byzantines ever understood or ever tried to understand autochthonous North Africans or endeavored to devise mutually beneficial policies and institutions.⁴⁰ Some Byzantine troops probably did not wish to be transferred to North Africa even if the imperial government had believed it possible to release them from other responsibilities.⁴¹

Ernest Mercier, one nineteenth-century scholar who wrote from the perspective of French colons in Algeria (Constantine), speculated without any documentation that during his rebellion in 647 Gregory the exarch in fact proclaimed himself "king of the Berbers."⁴² Autochthonous populations may or may not have been a dominant portion of the forces and

³⁶ Ibn 'Idhāri, *Bayān* 1: 17. Ibn al-Athīr, *Kāmil* III: 91–2.

³⁷ Kaegi 1981a: 120–208.

³⁸ Merrills 2004: 5, 15–16; and Modéran 2003a: 685–808.

³⁹ Procopius, *Wars* 4.21.3–12.

⁴⁰ Février 1985. ⁴¹ Modéran 2003a.

⁴² Mercier 1895–6: 185–6: 191. Also, slightly less strident, Mercier 1888: 1: 196: "il est probable que ce chef a été appuyé par les indigènes; le choix de Sbeitla comme capitale semble l'indiquer."

support for Gregory's rebellion at Sbeitla, but the autochthonous element definitely became important by later stages of local resistance to Muslims, namely, in the 680s and later, up to the ultimate disappearance of any remnant of Byzantine military forces and governmental authority, whether nominal or real, in North Africa.

It was the autochthonous tribes based in southern Numidia who formed the core of the tribal resistance to the Muslims after the defeat and death of Gregory the exarch and usurper. They may have cared little or nothing for the Roman or Byzantine Empire and paid little attention to the Muslims in Byzacena and Sbeitla until the Muslims began to encroach and trespass on their tribal territories in Numidia.

STRATEGIC OPTIONS 641-65

The distinguished historian of imperial Rome Léon Homo published a number of thoughts on North African military fundamentals in the fateful year of the commencement of World War I, 1914. He argued: "Rome never had the idea of systematically conquering the entirety of the Tripolitan hinterland. But in Africa the offensive was always the best of defenses. In order to have peace on the coast the sole effective means was to dominate the interior and the Romans had too much experience with African affairs to not use it in Tripolitania."⁴³ For the defense of Tripolitania, "the cities of the coast, which constituted the essential part of Roman territory, represented two-fold riches: agricultural and commercial ... It was necessary simultaneously to cover the agricultural zone of the littoral and in the whole extent of the country, to assure the freedom of commerce of the caravans."⁴⁴ Homo also pointed out: "In the west, between the Chott al Djerid and the Mediterranean, opened a natural invasion route, the gap of Gabes. The first concern of the Romans was to close this corridor to invaders. The Chott al Djerid, the mountains of the Tunisian South, Djebel Toual and Djebel Tebaga, presented two lines of parallel defense ..."⁴⁵ "At the southwest of Gabes, the *limes* bent at a right angle along the Tripolitanian coast to protect as far as the elevation of Leptis Magna. The center of the defense in this region was the plateau of Matmata ..."⁴⁶ Homo added, "The agricultural exploitation of the African lands has always been narrowly linked to the presence of water."⁴⁷ "In their [Romans'] eyes, the province of Tingitana

⁴³ Homo 1914: 134-5. ⁴⁴ Homo 1914: 140. ⁴⁵ Homo 1914: 140-1.

⁴⁶ Homo 1914: 142. ⁴⁷ Homo 1914: 151.

always had secondary importance."⁴⁸ He observed about the worldview of the Romans: "Morocco in reality hardly interested them except for an indirect manner and as a contre-coup. Their aim, once installed there, was essentially to cover their rich Spanish possessions against any danger coming from the south. This peril was not a chimera."⁴⁹ Homo makes a plausible observation about Mauretania Tingitana: "In order to protect Spain the possession of northern Morocco was indispensable."⁵⁰ Byzantine control of the pre-desert regions of southern Tunisia probably followed Roman precedents, to the extent that Byzantine manpower and budget permitted.⁵¹

The Byzantines pursued passive strategy and tactics (some scholars would label them Vegetian) against the Muslims that were consistent with those that they had used with mixed results against the autochthonous tribes in the sixth century and later. They encouraged the civilian inhabitants of North Africa to flee to fortresses or towers or hillside or mountain fastnesses or walled towns to await military relief or in order to wear out the invaders who they hoped would retire out of exhaustion or frustration or through negotiations or intrigues. They used the technique of blocking passes (Latin *clausurae*, Greek *kleisourai*) to close invasion routes if it were possible.⁵² One thinks of Byzantine defensive structures at Ksar Lemsa, 'Ayn Tounga, Sbiba, and Kesra in Tunisia or Taoura or Milev (Mila) or Tubursicu Numidarum (Khemissa) or Tipaza (Tifech, in Numidia) in Algeria as examples. Like the Romans before them, and like the colonial and post-colonial authorities after them, they built towers to try to survey and control critical corridors and local populations.

But the North African coastal region to the east, including Tripoli and modern Gabes (ancient Tacapae, southern Tunisia), remained without effective defenses, other than town walls. Perhaps the Byzantines made no efforts to block the coastal routes because they knew that invaders from the east and south could outflank any coastal defenses (cf. Ksar Ghilane, for example, and the British success against the German-held Mareth Line in 1943 using a detour). They moreover lacked the soldiers and the logistical capabilities to protect that region, where the heat was also very inhospitable for many Byzantine soldiers. The Romans earlier had assigned only modest numbers of soldiers, perhaps up to 1,200, to cover a band of 1,200

⁴⁸ Homo 1914: 234. ⁴⁹ Homo 1914: 234.

⁵⁰ Homo 1914: 235. ⁵¹ Troussset 2004.

⁵² On *kleisoura*, Haldon 1999: 114, 177; A. Kazhdan, sv., "Kleisoura," *ODB* 1132.

kilometers of exposed territory.⁵³ This region was climatically fragile, with shortages of water and food that made it difficult to support troops and cavalry.⁵⁴

Comparison of place names in Arabic with known Late Roman toponymics in North Africa⁵⁵ can help to weigh various traditions. References to the initial Muslim capture of 'Ayn Jallūla (Cululis) in several Arabic historical traditions lead to some interesting conclusions. 'Ayn Jallūla was said to be an objective of the Muslims immediately after the founding of al-Qayrawān. 'Abd al-Malik b. Marwān (who subsequently became caliph) commanded troops from Medina, sent by Mu'āwiya, and he successfully used catapults in besieging and capturing the city.⁵⁶ Jallūla's name for the Byzantines and Romano-Africans was Cululis. It had a bishop in 484, as historians know from an extant episcopal list.⁵⁷ Its relatively uninvestigated ruins indicate that there was a Late Roman and Byzantine fortress there. It was located on the route from Qayrawān into the mountains. Behind it lay the formidable fort of Limisa or Ksar Lemsa, the best preserved Byzantine fortress in North Africa, which blocked passage north of the Tunisian Dorsal. The reference to the Muslim capture of 'Ayn Jallūla seems plausible, although no confirmation exists in any Greek or Latin source.⁵⁸ Its capture opened the way into the Dorsal Mountains of what is modern Tunisia, at the north of the Byzantine province of Byzacena. A new struggle was about to begin.

The wealth that 'Abd al-Malik b. Marwān gained from participation in this expedition, which Marwān b. al-Ḥakam had authorized and ordered on instructions of Mu'āwiya, enhanced the wealth of the powerful Marwānids and also solidly and indelibly identified that powerful family with the Muslim campaign to conquer North Africa.

The Dorsal mountains of Tunisia and especially the mountains of northeast Algeria contained forbidding fastnesses such as Constantine (Constantina) to which defenders could retire and where they could withstand lengthy sieges. The craggy fortress of Constantine, the capital

⁵³ Mrabet and Troussset 2003: 82–3.

⁵⁴ Mzabi 1993 on dryness 23–36, hot temperature 37–45, poor vegetation 45–56, and deficiencies in water 56–85. My own visit to the region of Sfax and conversations with local specialists on November 25, 2004 underscored for me the fragility of agriculture in this area.

⁵⁵ Excellent is Jaidi 1977. Other important statements on methodology for toponymy: Benabbès 2004: 175–6, 187–336, 399–402.

⁵⁶ Khalifa b. Khayyāt, *Ta'rikh*: 129; Ibn Khaldūn, *Ta'rikh* IV: 222, erroneously dates assault and capture of 'Ayn Jallūla or Cululis to AH 34 (654). Benabbès 2004: 249.

⁵⁷ Benabbès 2004: 467. ⁵⁸ Pringle 2002: 281–2.

of Numidia, contained many underground passageways and hiding places that reinforced the defensive capabilities of its sheer cliffs and gorges. It was not impregnable but it was very difficult to capture. Northern Numidia's mountainous roads were treacherous and highly vulnerable to surveillance, ambushes, and interdiction. Winter weather could be extremely harsh and impede movement and provisioning. This was not a region suitable for easy maneuver. Local help was very desirable; otherwise costly troubles were likely. The Muslims wisely bypassed those well-defended and well-watered inhospitable strongholds to strike westward from the vicinity of Sbeitla at more vulnerable regions in the southern Numidian plains in which conditions were more familiar to them. This did not happen immediately after their initial victory in 647. The initial direction of Muslim probes had been northward, but now, after a pause, probes veered to the west. The temptation for some Muslims was to thrust westward from Qayrawān and Sbeitla in the direction of Tebessa and points beyond. The region of Sbeitla became a pivot or axis, or one could imagine it as the transverse of an "X" for changing the direction westward of important Muslim military momentum. Muslim reduction of mountain fortresses could wait, although their retention by defenders meant that there was always a risk that defenders might sally forth and assault the still fragile new hold that Muslims were establishing. But in the meantime raiders could inflict painful damage to humans and to structures and agriculture and livestock.

Other Late Roman and Byzantine Numidian strongpoints such as Baghai and Tubna (Tobna, Tubunae) and Tahūda (Tabudeos) had been created to monitor, contain, control, and tax the potential movements of autochthonous tribes from south of the Aures Mountains to areas north of that chain. The strongpoints were situated in gaps that yawned in what otherwise was an east-west chain of Aures Mountains. Zabi Justiniana, which was located in the Hodna at Beschilga (near M'sila) and established immediately after the Byzantine reconquest in the sixth century, appears to have been the westernmost major outpost of Byzantine control in the interior. Few traces of it remain today on the slight elevation that it occupies in the plain of the Hodna.

However Byzantine fastnesses were not primarily designed as any linear barrier against raiders or military expeditions coming from the east or southeast. They were located on low elevations to permit surveillance of surrounding plains and were surrounded by rectangular high stone walls for protection against raids. From the post at Baghai sentinels could survey the Numidian plains with the naked eye for a

distance of twenty-two to twenty-five kilometers to the east in the direction of Tebessa.⁵⁹ In the case of Baghai it was possible to have two hours' notice before hostile mounted forces or eight hours' notice before hostile infantry reached the locality. These posts were located in regions in which inhabitants could raise some cereals but where the grazing of sheep and goats predominated. Probably the garrisons grew some cereals and raised some sheep themselves for their own support. Mounted troops would have been essential. The posts controlled key east–west and north–south axes in the open country between mountain chains. They potentially enabled the Byzantines, like the Romans, to survey, supervise, tax, and perhaps control nomadic movements, especially those from the southern desert into the north. However they could also offer some resistance to mounted raiders from the east. Although constructed by the Byzantines, they could become strongpoints and muster-points for autochthonous tribes in southern Numidia. The fortresses could not hold out indefinitely, but they offered temporary refuge to hard-pressed and terrified civilians and could be departure points for horsemen to watch, to follow, and possibly to engage raiders. They were accessible to water.

In retrospect, several developments were significant. At some point autochthonous tribes took control of those Eurasian strongpoints, so by the final decades of the seventh century it was they who presided over those strategic positions with some kind of informal relationships with more distant Byzantine authorities and units.⁶⁰ The interests and perspectives of these tribes and their leaders were narrow and their ultimate allegiances were tribal and sanguine, as they perceived blood ties, and not territorial. They did not regard themselves as Roman or Byzantine but welcomed some imperial recognition of their status. For their part, it was difficult for the Byzantines to recognize any autochthonous leader as some kind of king, let alone emperor, of Romans and Africans or Numidians. Byzantium would not lightly concede such titulature. Byzantium did not want any seventh-century version of a Mastias or Masuna (the Numidian leader who in an inscription from 508 CE proclaimed himself king of Moors and Romans, *Maurorum et Romanorum*).⁶¹ Byzantium did not

⁵⁹ So (retired General) Jean-Pierre Faure informed me during our visit to Baghai in June 2005.

⁶⁰ Hypotheses about tribal groupings and spheres of territorial control: Modéran 2003a: 685–808.

⁶¹ Camps 1988: 153–7; Kadra 1983.

welcome autonomy or autonomous politics anywhere if it could avoid it. The psychological and theoretical barriers to Byzantine acceptance of any such autochthonous regime impeded the creation of conditions and incentives for the emergence of a viable local resistance in North Africa against the Muslims. The outcome was confusion and missed opportunities instead of coordination.

CHAPTER 8

The riddle of Constans II

The abortive revolt of Exarch Gregory, however costly as a military failure in 647, and however much of a first shock, brought certain benefits for Emperor Constans II (r. 641–69). His government's officials could deflect blame from themselves. Instead they excoriated the treacherous and disloyal usurper Gregory and his single-minded Catholic and Chalcedonian partisans for the military disaster at Sbeitla in 647 and its effects. The consequences of the ill-conceived and unsuccessful framing of Christology and the failure to forge a united front with the government were evident in the outcome of events. But once local dissidents had settled their differences with Constans II and domestic peace had been proclaimed, there was no individual other than Constans II on whom to lay the responsibility for future military defeats in North Africa at the hands of the Muslims. Gregory and his partisans furthermore had perished or disappeared in captivity. This may be yet another reason for Constans II's risky decision to try personal command or overhaul or stiffening of Byzantine defenses in the west, including for Africa, in the early 660s. Imperial distaste for and distrust of autonomous and autochthonous movements coupled with a wish to reverse a deteriorating military situation also impelled the direct intervention by Constans II.

A principal if enigmatic player in the fate of Byzantine North Africa, Constans II with his major undertakings in the central and western Mediterranean between 663 and his assassination in 669 in Syracuse, Sicily, have understandably presented something of a riddle.¹ They stand out in the final decades of Byzantine North Africa and help to explain the dynamics of the Muslim conquest. He even received the epithet of "the westerner" in some later Byzantine historical tradition.² The survival of Byzantine North Africa was of concern not only to inhabitants of the

¹ Sv. "Konstans II," no. 3691, *PMBZ* 2: 480–4. Death date: Greenwood 2004: 49.

² Peter of Alexandria: *Κωνσταντίνος ὁ ὄστικος*, Samodurova 1961: 196, line 32.

provinces of Byzacena, Africa, and Numidia but also to the reputation and interests of the imperial dynasty. First one must consider the larger historical context.

Contemporary historians often object to investigating political and military leaders at the top. Many reject the underlying assumptions or value of studying "great men," or even lesser figures such as Constans II. So for some, even investigating such an emperor is erroneous and unworthy of the commitment of substantial historical labors. Moreover the scarcity and opacity of primary sources in Latin, Greek, and Arabic impede historical inquiry into the seventh century in Italy and elsewhere. To understand Constans II in context requires also understanding the Byzantine Empire's difficult hurdles in Italy, North Africa, and even further away to the east in Anatolia.³

CONSTANS II IN HISTORIOGRAPHY

In the year 1910 the eminent British historian and Byzantinist J. B. Bury favorably but tersely reflected on Constans II's efforts and objectives to save the empire's possessions in the west in these words:

He saw that it was imperative to defend Africa and guard the western basin of the Mediterranean, and that, in order to do this effectively, the Imperial power in Sicily and South Italy must be consolidated ... he intended to give the Empire a second focus in the West ... His own presence was necessary ... The failure of Constans in his designs must not be allowed to obscure the wisdom of his idea. He underrated the difficulty of subduing the Lombards in South Italy; his measures for organizing the defence of Africa were not very effective; he was unsuccessful at sea.⁴

A few decades later, on the eve of World War II, another eminent British historian, Arnold J. Toynbee, commented pessimistically on Constans II's (and Heraclius') supposed objectives in pondering a move of seat of imperial government: "it would have failed ultimately"; of Constans II, Toynbee noted: "his building could not have withstood for long the shock of successive Arab and Berber and Lombard and Frankish assaults." "Sicily was never at any time capable of providing the basis for a Hellenic world power."⁶ Toynbee offered other speculative comparisons

³ I learned very much from my March 2003 Visiting Professorship at the University of Bologna, on both of its Bologna and Ravenna campuses.

⁴ Bury 1910: II: 24-5. ⁵ Toynbee 1935-61: IV: 589-91, quotations: 590-1.

⁶ Toynbee 1935-61: IV: 591.

between considerations of Constans II and his grandfather Heraclius on moving the seat of government from Constantinople.⁷ The discussion of Constans II by the Byzantinist A. Stratos is unpersuasive. The best analysis of the expedition of Constans II to Italy comes from P. Corsi.⁸ Several neglected seventh-century primary sources, especially Semitic ones, both Arabic and Syriac (and the Greek and Latin translations of a Syriac text, which is entitled Pseudo-Methodius), offer additional insights.⁹

Constans II moved west to Italy and Sicily from Constantinople and Anatolia in 663 because of several strategic calculations. A glance at a map of the Mediterranean shows the barbell-shaped remaining parts of Constans' imperiled empire which required emergency attention and reinforcement by him. As the Muslim threat swelled in North Africa simultaneously with that of the Lombards in Italy, Constans II probably believed that he had to do something to try to save North Africa and Italy.¹⁰ Italy and Sicily could serve as a strategic pivot. Any such decision and strategy involved major commitments to the buildup, exercise and maintenance of naval power and naval supremacy. It is impossible to enumerate his military force with any certainty.

Improved knowledge (although far from perfect) of seventh-century CE Muslim raids and expeditions into Byzantine Africa and against Sardinia help to appreciate the policymaking of Constans II somewhat better. Constans II inherited power in late 641 at the age of eleven, after the unexpected and premature death of his father Heraclius Constantine (sometimes known as Constantine III), who had reigned only a few months after the decease of the dynasty's founder, Heraclius. Reappraisals of his grandfather Heraclius encourage another look at Constans II himself. Investigations of Heraclius¹¹ reveal some characteristics of Heraclius in respect of which he and Constans II may be compared. Constans was conscious of domestic strife at the death of Heraclius and his own vulnerability vis-à-vis factions within the capital of Constantinople and in the provinces of the empire and more particularly within the army.¹²

⁷ Toynbee 1935–61: IV: 330–4. Stratos 1968–80: III. ⁸ Corsi 1983.

⁹ Ekonomou 2007: 158–98. For broader background on Italy, Llewellyn 1971, repr. 1993. Noble 1984. Neglected sources include *Die syrische Apokalypse des Pseudo-Methodius*, ed. and trans. Reinink (Leuven: 1993) and *Die Apokalypse des Pseudo-Methodius*, ed. and trans. Aerts and Kortekaas (Leuven: 1998); Elias of Nisibis, *Chron.*; Agapius, *Kitāb al 'Unwān* 1900–10.

¹⁰ Corsi 1983: 85–96, 117–18 is probably correct.

¹¹ Kaegi 2003c: 58–69, 100–2, 300–23; Foss, 2005: 93–102.

¹² Discussed in Kaegi 1981a: 158–83. It would be superfluous to repeat that material here. Unproven but erudite conjectures in Sertipani 2006: 115–30.

But Constans II's expedition to and stay in Italy emerge from a longer historical context that preceded his departure from Constantinople in the spring or early summer of 662. He then voyaged by boat for Tarentum, Italy in perhaps September or October 662, or more plausibly, as some have argued, landed in spring 663 in southern Italy.¹³ Constans probably moved to the central Mediterranean partly because of his failure in his 660–1 campaign in the Armenian Caucasus and because of the successful counter-measures of Mu'awiya.¹⁴ He had failed in his personal efforts to reorganize the Caucasus, most notably what he regarded as his Armenian lands, in 660–1. Constans II did not arrive in the west flush with new prestige from having accomplished any great victories in the east against the Muslims or over his Armenian subjects.

Constans II in 663 faced problems in Italy and North Africa different from those he encountered in trying to maintain his imperial authority in Anatolia and the Caucasus. His subjects, especially the elites of Byzantine Italy,¹⁵ possessed social structures and objectives that sometimes meshed and sometimes did not with those of the Constantinopolitan and Anatolian core of Byzantium. The same was even truer for Byzantine North Africa.¹⁶ It was impossible for the inhabitants of North Africa to build an effective defense without a fleet from the Byzantine Empire and without the empire's technical support and its diplomatic and military intelligence. And the empire needed the support and assistance of the North Africans. However, as already noted, various obstacles – ecclesiastical problems, doubts about the imperial succession, fiscal pressures, cultural difficulties, and logistical and geographical barriers to communication – made relations and cooperation between Byzantines and North Africans difficult.

Constans II miscalculated when he intervened personally in Italy in 663. He already had slain, or arranged for slaying, his brother Theodosius in 659, which indicated although it did not explain still more underlying internal Byzantine military unrest.¹⁷ Killing Theodosius generated unpopularity, if one can trust later historical traditions, and controversy that may well have convinced Constans II of the expediency or necessity

¹³ Controversial conclusions on the chronology by Zuckerman 2005: 80–1, who, n. 5, p. 81, criticizes the chronological hypotheses of Corsi 1983: 593–601.

¹⁴ Constans II failed in his campaign in Armenia in 660–1: Greenwood 2004: 73, n. 215, "His plans in the east had been wrecked and there was no imminent prospect of recovery." However for a contrary opinion: that this campaign of Constans in the Caucasus met with success: Zuckerman 2005: 80–1.

¹⁵ T. S. Brown 1984: 47, 84–108. ¹⁶ Conant 2004.

¹⁷ Sv. "Theodosios," no. 7797, *PMBZ* 4: 504. Turner 2003.

of departing from Constantinople for the west, leaving other decisions in the hands of his son Constantine IV and other trustworthy officials. Like his grandfather Heraclius who visited various famous ancient places in the ancient near east, he visited and associated his name with some famous ancient sites in Italy, such as Rome. But in Italy he mishandled his siege of Benevento and the battle of Forino against the Lombards. He failed to overcome the Lombard leaders Romuald or Grimoald. He introduced no distinctively new military tactics and strategy and developed no new way to raise troops and to train them in Italy.¹⁸ His fiscal measures met fierce opposition from various tax-paying constituencies, including the Catholic Church. No text of any military doctrine or memorandum that Constans II followed or issued during his expedition in Italy is extant. He discovered no new formula for military success in Italy that he or his commanders could transfer to North Africa or Anatolia in an effort to stem the Muslims.

One hostile Byzantine tradition attributes to Constans II the desire to transfer the imperial government to the older Rome.¹⁹ Constans II had a tenuous hold on power at the beginning of his reign even though he was the center of attention. The legitimacy of the Heraclian dynasty was none too secure anyway. He had to prove himself. Yet his grandfather's legacy was ambiguous: magnificent victories but also many terrible military disasters, conspiracies, and scandals. Constans II and his advisors faced the problem of finding a justification for his rule and a standard or benchmark and justification for his policies.

Another problem stood out. Members of the Heraclian dynasty, including Constans II (to judge from the government's trials of Pope Martin I and Maximus the Confessor), sought to blame others for defeats at the hands of Saracens or Muslims, namely, citing others' disobedience of imperial orders (which implicitly were assumed to be intrinsically well conceived) or others' deliberate sabotage of imperial initiatives.²⁰ That way

¹⁸ Hodgkin 1967: vi: 253–68. However Zuckerman 2005: 80, believes that Constans II's military operations in Italy were not as unsuccessful as most scholars have assumed.

¹⁹ βουλόμενος καὶ τὴν βασιλείαν εἰς τὴν πρεσβυτέραν Ῥώμην μετενεγκεῖν, Johannes Zonaras, *Epitome historiarum* xiv: 19.29 = ed. M. Pinder and T. Büttner-Wobst (Bonn: 1841–97) iii: 221. Σύνοψις Χρονικῆς, Μεσαιωνικῆς Βιβλιοθήκη: vii: 111. Βουλευθεὶς ἐν Ῥώμῃ τὴν βασιλείαν μεταστῆσαι: Theophanes, *Chron.*, AM 6153 (De Boor) (I: 348); trans. Mango and Scott 486, "intending to transfer the imperial capital to Rome."

²⁰ Accusation against Pope Martin I for his alleged correspondence and financial contacts with "Saracens": Martin I, letter: *PL* 129, col. 587. See also: *Maximus the Confessor and His Companions*: 49–51. "Relatio factae motionis inter domnum Maximum monachum et socium eius coram principibus in secretario," *Scripta saeculi vii vitam Maximi Confessoris Illustrantia*,

they could continue to try to emulate the successful campaigns and strivings of Heraclius, the founder of the dynasty, despite the serious military reverses, especially those at the hands of the Muslims, late in his reign, which they refused to attribute to him.

IMITATION OF HIS GRANDFATHER HERACLIUS

The very young Constans II endeavored to justify his policies as a continuation in spirit and in fact of those of his grandfather Heraclius. Hence he strove to campaign in person and to direct defenses behind the military front but not too far from it. However, explicit textual documentation is missing, so there was a tendency to stress the last will and testament of Heraclius, including his crown, and Heraclius' order almost certainly very late in his reign to undertake a new census of the whole empire. It is even conceivable that the account or tradition of Heraclius' order for a new census was floated or elaborated in the reign of Constans II to justify subjecting the empire's taxpayers to the miseries and ordeal of a new order of taxes and controls. The census may genuinely have been started and finished under Heraclius or its actual implementation may have occurred after Heraclius' decease, but full responsibility was ascribed to him by his successors, especially his grandson Constans II. Additional particulars are lacking. Whatever the real facts, there was an effort (on his part or on that of his advisors) to associate Constans II undeviatingly with the precedents, traditions, and policies and tangibles, that is physical items, of his impressive grandfather.²¹

Constans II's persistent personal campaigning fits into the above pattern of copying the precedents of Heraclius, who broke with precedent to campaign almost perpetually in person on many battlefronts and campaigns. Muslim and Christian Arabic sources sometimes even conflate Constans II and Heraclius under the generic term "Heraclius." Constans II probably sought to involve himself personally because the last military memories of victories against external foes, especially those coming from the east, were those of Heraclius who personally engaged and risked his

ed. Allen and Neil. *CC, Series Graeca*, 39: 12–51. Brandes 2002: 444, 457; Brandes 1998: 141–212. *Martino I papa (649–653)* 1992. Neil 2006a; Neil 2006b: 170–1.

²¹ A Georgian text reports a census made in Georgia at the end of the reign of Heraclius and then sent back to Constantinople: S. Rapp 2003: p. 354, vol. 113, c. 14, on some kind of a Byzantine census in Georgia, apparently taken at the end of reign of Heraclius; cf. comments by S. Rapp on pp. 381–2. This may have been an innovation that created grievances, which may explain or illuminate references in the *Liber Pontificalis* to contemporary protests by North African, Sardinian, and Sicilian landholders.

life and reputation in campaigning. They were the only successful precedents in the effective historical memory of the mid-seventh century, even though Heraclius' efforts against the Muslims failed catastrophically. But Heraclius personally went out on campaign, and the empire's armies and their commanders may have expected that. Certainly the military inactivity of sovereigns who did not campaign did not leave a great record of military success either. Constans II's own father Heraclius Constantine avoided campaigning in person, while Constans II in contrast emulated the successful military precedents and examples of his grandfather.²²

Like his grandfather Heraclius, Constans II feared treachery and espionage. Like his grandfather Heraclius, he blamed military defeats in the time of his grandfather and in his own reign on internal betrayal. Hence his courtiers' accusations against Maximus the Confessor and Pope Martin I. Constans, like Heraclius, had a difficult problem to explain: the empire's military disasters at the hands of the Muslims. He resorted to public accusations and ridicule and denunciation of accused perpetrators of harm to the empire and his dynasty. Like his grandfather Heraclius, Constans strove to construct and maintain close ties and communications with his subjects. But no specific reference exists to his resort to devices such as military or other bulletins or public letters to keep his subjects in Constantinople and elsewhere in the east informed about his activities (including his military achievements), his policies, and his solicitude for the welfare of his subjects. It is uncertain how Constans II maintained contact and communicated with his subjects elsewhere, including Sardinia, while he traveled and resided in Italy and Sicily. The Merovingian chronicler Fredegarius preserves a tantalizing contemporary tradition favorable to Constans II, perhaps reflecting imperial publicity and claims. Speaking of the years 658–9 he states that Constans II "recovered little by little his empire from the Saracens,"²³ and that he will explain how this came about in another section of his history, which does not exist. Fredegarius' glimpse of Constans II is one of an emperor at a moment of imperial recovery and of incipient renewal before the violent death of Constans and decisive political and military defeats.

Both Heraclius and Constans II reportedly (according to sources of diverse types and written even in diverse languages) sought to encourage their local subjects to take up arms to defend themselves against aliens, irrespective of whether these enemies were Muslims in Asia or Egypt

²² Emperors who campaign and others who do not: Whitby 2005: 367–78.

²³ Fredegarius, *Chron.* 81 (Krusch 162; Devillers and Meyers trans. 184–5).

or Lombards in Italy. Yet both suffered mixed results in their respective endeavors to encourage self-defense.

The imperial government normally opposed and rejected local bartering with the Muslims for truces and security. Emperor Heraclius energetically sought to dismiss any bureaucrats or ecclesiastics who engaged in such activities, and to replace them with more reliable ones. A similar process took place in North Africa during the reign of Constans II. Constans attempted to enforce such policies outside of North Africa as well. This policy, like so many of his others, is a continuation of the policies of his grandfather Heraclius. Constantinople was very suspicious of anyone who made or might make unauthorized contacts with Muslims. It suspected treason on the part of any governor or ecclesiastic who showed hesitation about any aspect whatever of imperial policy, whether civil or religious.

The combination of Heraclius' personal leadership and presence on campaigns and initiatives together with the imperial propaganda blaming defeats on betrayal, disobedience, stubbornness, and misunderstanding all contributed to form the heritage that encouraged Constans II's personal appearances on land and in naval campaigns, but they raised fatal risks. Before his coming to Italy, Constans II previously assumed personal command of imperial troops in Armenia, which resulted in an unsatisfactory outcome. He likewise personally participated in the disastrous naval battle at Phoenix (called *The Battle of the Masts* by Muslim historians) in 654/5 and barely escaped with his life. One Muslim tradition attributed that disastrous Byzantine naval buildup and decision to risk a major sea battle to Byzantine reactions to their recent military defeats in North Africa.²⁴ Constans II consistently tried to use his personal presence and hands-on involvement to solve vulnerable external border situations. He probably feared to delegate sufficient military resources to someone else lest that commander attempt another effort to seize the imperial throne at Constantinople.

The personal presence of the emperor elevated risk but insured that no intermediary would sabotage, disobey, misinterpret or by incompetence ruin imperial commands with respect to diplomatic or military policy. The personal presence of the emperor was required to make the system work, as in the case of Komnenian warfare.²⁵ The military record of Constans II receives praise for effort and courage, but its ultimate results were not successful. The performance of Constans II's troops is mixed at

²⁴ Al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh* 1: 2867. ²⁵ Birkenmeier 2002: 235.

best against the Lombards in 663 in battle and in sieges. The record of Constans II's military campaigning against the Lombards is inglorious, although twenty-first-century historians must exercise caution because Lombard historiography (especially Paul Diaconus) exaggerates Lombard feats and underappreciates Byzantine ones.²⁶

Constans II's failures or limited failure in North Africa parallel his experience and legacy in Anatolia, where Muslim winterings (winter campaigns, winter encampments) started in 662/3.²⁷ The rapid loss of North Africa followed Constans II's death in Sicily, but there is no historical tradition in any language of Byzantine military successes in battle against the Muslims in North Africa or even the devising of any defensive line or system of resistance.

ECONOMIC, MILITARY, AND RELIGIOUS IMPEDIMENTS

North African and Sardinian and Sicilian and Italian landowners resented what they regarded as the extortion of heavy taxes by Byzantine officials. Sicily and Calabria in southern Italy were relatively rich in revenues in that era and had not suffered as much damage from warfare as other regions.²⁸ They were vital for the financing of the empire's activities and services. Where were these payments going? For the defense of Africa or for the defense of Anatolia, or for some other far-away expenditures, such as general expenses of the government? There were big controversies and disagreements. The first great Muslim victory over the Byzantines in North Africa in 647 significantly reduced available funds for the Byzantine government, because the Muslim-imposed tribute was very high. There was a close connection between military operations and diplomacy in the east and the west. Each kilo of gold that the Muslims extorted from the Africans diminished potential resources for Byzantium in its struggle against the Muslims, while increasing those of the Muslims.

The political and military situation in mid-seventh-century North Africa, Italy, Sardinia, and Sicily is not a total mystery. Part of the explanation for landowners' grievances may be local fears that their taxes were going back to the benefit of Constantinople and Anatolia, and were not primarily being used to defend themselves in Sardinia, Italy, Sicily, or Africa. There were misunderstandings and miscommunications. The

²⁶ Paulus Diaconus, *Historia Langobardorum* 5.10–11, 16, *MGH SRL* 1878: 190–1, 192.

²⁷ Kaegi 2004. ²⁸ Cosentino 2007: 597–601, and Zuckerman 2005: 105.

Heraclian dynasty failed or did not know how to manage simultaneously to raise revenues, conciliate, and raise the morale and fighting ethos of its lay and clerical North African and Sardinian subjects.

Byzantine resources were insufficient to stop the expansion westward of the Muslims somewhere in the south of Tunisia, in the vicinity of Tacapae or Gabes. There is much valuable land that is too exposed, without natural defensible barriers along the coast between Gabes and Sousse.²⁹ There is no evidence of significant Byzantine military defenses – forts, towers, trenches – being erected in extreme southern Tunisia, near what would today be the Tuniso-Libyan border, in anticipation of any Muslim penetration.³⁰ There is just no evidence for such Byzantine defensive activity, no matter how rational it might seem to modern strategists.³¹ The island of Jirba (Djerba) was a potential lynch-pin for securing such a defense along the southern littoral.

The modern military historian John Keegan correctly points out that warfare has taken place in relatively restricted areas of land and sea. He notes how certain localities repeatedly are the scene of violent conflict, battles, and campaigns: "Battles not only tend to recur on sites close to each other ...but have also frequently been fought on exactly the same spot over a very long period of history."³² This raises issues of comparative military history, even comparing with a situation of 1300 years later. The terrain of North Africa has experienced many other wars. Although intended for description of topography in World War II, the US military history of operations in North Africa during that war contains useful observations on Tunisian military geography that pertain even to the seventh century.³³

The loss of Byzantine North Africa would not be a minor one for Constans II and the Byzantines. It would entail the loss of tax revenues, populations, some minerals, and agricultural wealth, but strategically its loss would threaten Byzantine Sicily, southern Italy, and east-west navigation in the Mediterranean. As long as the Byzantines remained in control of North Africa, there was always the chance that they might use it as a base from which to try to reconquer Egypt from the Muslims. This may sound

²⁹ Al-Bakri, *Masalik* 665–70. ³⁰ Daillier 1985; cf. Diehl 1896: 231, 235, 303, 374.

³¹ On this region, see Troussset 1974. ³² Keegan 1993: 69–70.

³³ Howe 1957, repr. 1991: 280–3, on central Tunisia pp. 347–9, on the vicinity of Sbeitla, p. 428, on Kasserine Pass, pp. 444–7, and on the Mareth–Gabes region: pp. 524–5. Still of utility are French, American, British, and German military maps that respective staffs prepared for use in World War II. The history of British campaigning in North Africa is also of value: Playfair and Morony 1966; Atkinson 2002. Longer context: de Planhol 1968: 124–80.

foolish and impossible, but it was from North Africa that Heraclius and his cousin Nicetas had conquered Egypt and the entire Byzantine Empire in their civil war and rebellion against the usurping Emperor Phocas in the years between 608 and 610. A Byzantine threat remained conceivable. The Fâtimids would later conquer Egypt from Tunisia.³⁴ Muslim control of Egypt permitted the Muslims to tap the human and material resources of Egypt for military operations in North Africa.³⁵ By the 660s the Muslims had consolidated and developed the means to maximize their control of Egypt for backing and exploring major new initiatives in North Africa.

Both Heraclius and Constans II faced mental environments of eschatological, indeed apocalyptic (although not explicitly millennial) expectations. Those fears and hopes swelled throughout the seventh century and in many regions east and west.³⁶ They affected and nurtured certain religious manifestations and movements.

Like Heraclius, Constans II strove to cultivate good relations with popes, although realities often diverged from those aspirations. Emperor and pope achieved a grudging *détente* until Constans' assertive financial measures aroused trenchant papal criticism and opposition.

CHALLENGES FOR GATHERING INTELLIGENCE

It is unclear how Constans II gained his intelligence (or how accurate and full that information was) about Muslims in Syria, Egypt, and North Africa, and their strength and intentions including strategy. Presumably Byzantine diplomatic missions to the Muslims helped to inform him and his advisers somewhat about those topics. He and his staff probably received additional information from refugees, pilgrims, clergy and monks, merchants, travelers, sailors, and, of course, spies. It is likewise unclear just how well informed Constans II was concerning the extensive and varied terrain and autochthonous populations of North Africa. Whether Constans II and his advisers had any appreciation of the potential of Numidia as a base for resistance to the Muslims is uncertain, even doubtful.

It was not easy to appreciate the military potential and needs of Numidia from Constans' residence at Syracuse in Sicily. It was difficult to imagine the terrain and the situation of Numidian cities such as Constantine or Tebessa or Milev (Mila) or Calama (Guelma) or

³⁴ Brett 2001. ³⁵ Sijpesteijn 2007b: 185. ³⁶ Greenwood 2002: 394.

the interrelationships between plains and chains of hills and mountains and water supplies. Tribal structures were also hard to fathom from Constantinople or Syracuse. There were no good Anatolian or Caucasus parallels. That was another problem or contradiction in the well-meaning actions of Constans II. He lacked the experiences of his grandfather Heraclius with handling autochthonous tribes in Numidia and Byzacena. His advisers probably handed down counsel on how to handle or to communicate with tribes, but he himself never visited the interior of Numidia, namely Constantine, or the key crossroads fortress of Tebessa, let alone the more remote Aures region, even though Numidian defenses needed attention. The Eurasian Mountains lay outside of effective Byzantine control in the seventh century, irrespective of theoretical imperial claims for the rightful reach of its authority as the continuator of the Roman Empire to the full limits of earlier imperial control, and irrespective of whether the Byzantines ever managed to control the Aures in the sixth century.³⁷

But the world of Constans II did not replicate that of his grandfather Heraclius. Heraclius was the first Byzantine emperor to face some kind of phenomenon of early Islam, which was only beginning to take form and was poorly understood in his reign. He strove to contain Muslim expansion in Syria and upper Mesopotamia and Anatolia. Some scholars doubt whether Heraclius ever understood that he was confronting a newly emergent religion. But even though Islam continued to develop contemporary with his reign, Constans II had to cope with a vaster, more elaborate, and more mature Muslim political and military entity, and like it or not, he and his officials found it necessary or to their interests to engage in diplomatic relations with that entity on some occasions. It is doubtful whether Constans II or his advisers ever developed much understanding of the then-evolving Islam.

The well-disseminated but obscure and even haunting concept of renewal or *ananeosis* continues to appear on some bronze Constantinopolitan coinage in the reign of Constans II, perpetuating the precedent of Heraclonas, the half-brother of Constans' father Heraclius Constantine.³⁸ Just what

³⁷ Scholars disagree about the extent to which the Byzantines ever controlled the Aures, even in the sixth century: Troussset 2002; Modéran 2003a: 354–61; P. Morizot: 1999; P. Morizot, sv. "Aurès: époque vandale et byzantine," *EB* 1103–13.

³⁸ *DO Cat* 2, part 2, Pt. 1: 101, 106; *DO Cat* 2, Pt. 2: 391–4, 396–8. Kaegi 1995: 218. See Donald 2000: 159. Constantinian theme of *Fel. Temp. Reparatio*: Ando 2000: 226, n. 87, for references to modern analyses. References to *ananeosis* and Constantine I: Themistius Or. 23.298a–b; *Chron. Pasch* (Dindorf, 1832) 528; Malalas 13.7. Comparative material: Magdalino 1994.

seventh-century resonances it had is unclear. Usually the precedents of the coinage of Constantine I receive attention in analyses of the concept of renewal on the coinage of Constans II, but renewal may also refer, after the negative gap of civil strife under Martina and Heraclonas in 641, to the goal or hopes for renewal or reassertion of ties with the policies and greatness of Heraclius, his grandfather and founder of the dynasty. Renewal can have several meanings. It is likewise unclear whether the ambitious concept of *ananeosis* had any special resonances in Constantine, Numidia, given the supposed but chronologically remote Constantinian echoes or reminiscences of such coinage.³⁹ Some other coins that Constans II struck at Carthage and at Constantinople invoke and reaffirm the Constantinian motto "By this conquer" (ἐν τούτῳ νικᾷ). The practical import and consequences are unknown.⁴⁰

But neither Heraclius, Constans II's grandfather, nor Heraclius' father Heraclius, who was Constans II's great-grandfather, to our knowledge ever campaigned in Italy. No secure attestation exists of Heraclius either visiting or passing through Italy, although that may have occurred. Constans II was innovating during his expedition to Italy and Sicily by asserting his presence there, even though in a more general sense he was following the Heraclian precedent of campaigning in person and eliminating layers of intermediaries between himself and his far-flung provincial subjects. So one should not try to push the comparison of Constans II and Heraclius too far; there are limits.

The adventus ceremony at Rome that Constans II encountered in meeting with Pope Vitalian in 663 was an example of Roman revival, even of antiquarianism.⁴¹ Heraclius also admired and identified with Roman institutions and protocol, even with what we might call Roman antiquarianism, perhaps to reinforce his own questionable authority with more legitimacy. Such ceremonies interested Constans II likewise and also become another mantle of legitimation. Constans II, unlike Heraclius in fighting the Persians but like Heraclius in confronting Muslims or Arabs,

³⁹ *Ananeosis* appears on at least one mosaic in one part of North Africa, Cyrenaica, but it is remote from Numidia and the mosaic's date is much earlier. Cyrenaica is the region from which his mother Gregoria's family originated, but one should use caution in discussing the issue of the prominence of *ananeosis* in Cyrenaica.

⁴⁰ Hahn, *MIB* 3: 136–40; Grierson, *DO Car* 2, Pt. 1: 92, 101, 106; *DO Car* 2, Pt. 2: 391–4, 396–8; Morrisson *BN Car* Constans II 13/Cpl/Ε/01–26, pp. 1: 344–7. Carthage, 13/Ct/Ε/01–3; Bates 1971; Kaegi 1995: 218. Cf. Eusebius, *Vita Constantini* 1.28.2. Contrary to Benabbes 2004: 109, this inscription signifies nothing special about Byzantine policy in North Africa or local ideology, for it was employed at Byzantine mints outside of Africa as well.

⁴¹ Caspar 1930–3: II 581–5.

was unable to find a way to split his foes or decapitate or neutralize their leadership.

NEW WAVE OF SHOCKS: GIGTHIS, JIRBA

Sbeitla was the first shock but in the late 660s a second wave of convergent shocks battered and shattered both Byzantine North Africa and Emperor Constans II. Tripoli, Libya was the starting point for some of these Muslim land and maritime raids against Byzantine North Africa and Sardinia and Sicily in the second half of seventh century, possibly assisted by resources from Egypt, especially from Mu'awiya b. Ḥudayj, who was also governor of Egypt, as had been 'Abd Allāh b. Abī Sarḥ. Evidence tends to help narrow the date for a Muslim naval raid against Gigthis to 667, but that does not explain or specify precisely the date for the Muslim raid against Sardinia to which the Pseudo-Methodius author also refers. Pseudo-Methodius indicates that more significant Muslim naval efforts – even though not necessarily any monolithic and unified fleet – emerged in the seventh century.

The late seventh-century (not later than the early 690s) *Pseudo-Methodius Apocalypse* illumines the strategic and mental world in which Constans II tried to cope in Italy and Sicily.⁴² The text originated in northwestern Iraq, in the vicinity of the Jabal Sinjar. The *Pseudo-Methodius Apocalypse* contains a reference to the North African port of Gigthis, whose history in the Late Antique and Early Byzantine periods is poorly known and even less well understood. It also refers to an otherwise unknown Muslim naval raid against an enigmatic port 'lwz' that it is now possible to identify as Olbia, in northeast Sardinia. The most important passage of the apocalypse reads, in referring to the Muslims (sons of Ishmael): "When the sons of Ishmael have seized power over every land and wasted cities and their districts and gained dominion in all islands, then they will build ships for themselves in the manner of birds and will fly over the waves of the sea. Then they will go up even to lands of the west as far as Rome the great and Illyricum and Gigthis and Thessalonica and [Olbia] the great, which is beyond Rome."⁴³

⁴² *Die Apokalypse des Pseudo-Methodius*. (Aerts and Kortekaas), 5 (4) and 5 (8) ed. and trans. into German now in *CSCO SS* vols. 220–1; Syriac version by G. Reinink, and the *CSCO Subsidia* the Greek and Latin versions = 5 (4) *CSCO*, vol. 569, Subsidia Tomus 97 (Leuven: 1998) Greek: 1: 94, 98, Latin 1: 95, 99. Commentary vol. 570, Subsidia Tomus 98 (Leuven: 1998) 11: 12, 11: 74.

⁴³ E. Sackur, *Sibyllinische Texte and Forschungen* (Halle: 1898) 67 n. 2, virtually initiated the study of Pseudo-Methodius, but misunderstood the site and speculated erroneously, leading others astray,

Once it is understood that there was a late seventh-century Muslim naval raid against the North African port of Gighthis, which lay opposite the island of Jirba (Jerba today in English), it is possible to make more sense of the apocalyptic text of Pseudo-Methodius. Tripoli (in Tripolitanian Libya) was the point of departure for the Muslim naval raid against Gighthis and may also have been the base for the raid against Olbia in Sardinia, which Pseudo-Methodius also lists.⁴⁴ A Muslim raid in 667 CE (AH 47) by the Muslim commander Ruwayfi' b. Thābit assaulted the Byzantine-controlled island of Jirba from Tripoli. It is likely this raid was part of or virtually coincided with the Muslim raid of 665 (AH 45) of Mu'āwiya b. Ḥudayj against Sousse (Hadrumetum) and the vicinity. Mu'āwiya b. Abī Sufyān sent Mu'āwiya ibn Hudayj who commanded 10,000 troops.⁴⁵ Mu'āwiya b. Ḥudayj had impressive military experience. As a younger man he had participated in the battle of the Yarmūk. Very significant is the participation in Muslim military operations at the island of Jirba of Faḍāla b. 'Ubayd with Ruwayfi' b. Thābit al-Anṣarī, but dated to 670 CE.⁴⁶ Jirba is relatively flat, with only a few elevations; invaders could easily overrun it if they managed to accomplish a landing in strength. It is unlikely that the island possessed a significant garrison.

Those major Muslim expeditions against North African and other western Mediterranean localities took place just before the assassination of Constans II in Sicily on July 15, 669.⁴⁷ (see Figures 5, 6, and 7.) They delivered still more shocks to Byzantine North Africa, to Byzantium, and to Christendom. They also may have a relation to early Muslim naval expeditions, especially the alleged second expedition of Mu'āwiya b. Ḥudayj, to Sicily and other Byzantine-controlled islands.⁴⁸ It is precisely this period

"Wohl von Gigon in Thracien oder Gigon in Macedonien herzuleiten." See Kaegi 2000: 161–7; Kaegi 2001: 10–11; Zedda 2006: 43–58. Arguments that Mu'āwiya successfully ordered the construction of new light-weight Muslim warships, which are mentioned in this text: Zuckerman 2005: 115–16.

⁴⁴ Useful information on Sardinia in Dyson and Rowland 2007: 188, but they give erroneous date of 705 for the initial Muslim raid on Sardinia.

⁴⁵ AH 45 (665): Ibn Abī Dinār, *al-Mu'nis* 39.

⁴⁶ Ibn Abī Dinār, *al-Mu'nis* 40. 'Alī b. al-Ḥasan Ibn 'Asākir, *ta'rikh Madinat Dimashq*, ed. Gharāma al-Amrāwī (Beirut: 1995–8), vol. 48: 296. Also, without mentioning Ruwayfi', in al-Ṭabarī, *Tārikh* AH 49, and Brooks 1898: 185–6. The participation by Ruwayfi' is also cited by Khalifa b. Khayyāt, AH 47 *Tā'rikh* 127, C. Wurtzel trans. "The Umayyads in the History of Khalifa ibn Khayyāt" (Ph.D. diss., Yale: 1977; in sect. 2.4.4 = 98–47/48. Al-Fazārī, *Kitāb al-Siyar* 243.

⁴⁷ Tāha 1989. Al-Bakrī, *al-Masālik* 668; Mālikī, *Riyād* 23–4; Ibn Nāji, *Ma'ālim* 1: 122–3. From Tripoli: Khalifa b. Khayyāt, *Tā'rikh*: AH 47 (667/8 CE), 127. He is an early transmitter (d. late eighth century). These Muslim sources do not explicitly mention Constans II.

⁴⁸ Al-Balādhurī, *Futūh*: 235; al-Ṭabarī, *Tā'rikh* 1: 2814–15 = al-Ṭabarī, *The Crisis of the Early Caliphate*, trans. R. S. Humphreys 1990: vol. xv, esp. pp. 20–3; Ibn Abī Dinār, *al-Mu'nis* 40. Ibn Nāji, dates to AH 45 or 665 CE, *Ma'ālim* 1: 45. Also on this, Ageil 1985: 83–4, p. 123, n. 113.



Figure 5 Solidus of Constans II with young Constantine IV. Syracuse, Sicily. Date 654–9. *DO Cat* 2,2 no. 158a.2 BZC 1957.70.D2009. © Dumbarton Oaks, Byzantine Collection, Washington, DC.



Figure 6 Solidus of Constans II with young Constantine IV. Syracuse, Sicily. Date 654–9. *DO Cat* 2,2 no. 156.b. BZC 1958.14.D2009. © Dumbarton Oaks, Byzantine Collection, Washington, DC.



Figure 7 Solidus of Constans II with Constantine IV. Syracuse, Sicily. Date 659–61. *DO Cat* 2,2 no. 161c. BZC 1960.120.D2009. © Dumbarton Oaks, Byzantine Collection, Washington, DC.

in which adventuresome Muslim raids from Tripoli struck at and sowed fright in Sardinia, Jirba, Gighthis, and Sicily, which were not expecting any Muslim naval strikes. The probable psychological impact of these surprising Muslim naval raids equalled or exceeded the actual material damage. Extant primary sources provide no details on tactics, numbers of combatants, casualties, material or human losses, quantities of booty, exact duration of operations, or financial costs of operations. All that is known about them is the date (or two alternative dates, AH 46 and 47) and names of a couple of Muslim commanders and the port of origin for the campaign, which was Tripoli in Libya.

Administrative and political actions decisively reinforced the Muslim military triumphs. In 667, presumably after these above victories, Caliph Mu'awiya ordered Maslama b. Mukhallad to join North Africa with his governorship of Egypt. This act formally placed sections of North Africa, especially Byzacena, under regular Muslim administrative authority.⁴⁹ The Muslims had restored their authority over Tripolitanian coastal towns that temporarily in the 650s and early 660s had relapsed to Byzantine control. This Muslim annexation and initiation of a new administrative order delivered more blows to Byzantine imperial prestige, although the surviving local inhabitants may have welcomed some normalization of their political situation, which helped to make it permanent. The administrative action marked another stage of the conquest. The year 670 saw 'Uqba b. Nāfi' become the first wālī or governor of what was to be called Ifriqiya or Africa.

POSSIBLE MOTIVES FOR ASSASSINATION OF CONSTANS II

The Muslim victories mentioned by Pseudo-Methodius and by Muslim narrators indicate very grave, indeed shocking, military reverses in North Africa for Byzantines in the late 660s, apparently during the governorship of Mu'awiya b. Ḥudayj. And these, especially the raid by two Muslim commanders, Mu'awiya b. Ḥudayj and Ruwayfi' b. Thābit, against the rich and strategic island of Jirba (off the coast of North Africa), were so destructive in 667 or 668 and so shocking that they contributed to pressures and rising dissatisfaction within Byzantine ranks against Constans II. The war was not going well for the Byzantines by that time. The Muslim victories in North Africa in the mid-660s probably contributed to a murky decision by some members of the imperial entourage, including courtiers and

⁴⁹ Al-Kindī, *Wulāt Miṣr* 603. Benabbès 2004: 254.

military, to assassinate Constans II. For some it may have been frustration and anxiety for North Africa, for others it may have been a desire to prioritize Anatolia instead of North Africa to find an acceptable exit from policies that seemed to be leading nowhere.

The military events in themselves may not really have been so important, but the Pseudo-Methodius *Apocalypse* disseminated and publicized the shock effect irrespective of historical realities. They constituted the second wave of shocks, the first having been the humiliating defeat of the Byzantines at Sbeitla in 647. The events of 665/6 and 667 in Africa were "only" destructive Muslim raids, but they exposed the failure of Constans II during his stay in Italy and Sicily to develop an effective defense for Africa. One might interpret them as a bell tolling for doom. The Muslim historians and Pseudo-Methodius may exaggerate the actual Muslim victory and dimensions of the Byzantine defeats at these ports, but these events were very embarrassing for the Byzantines, Christians, and in particular for Emperor Constans II.⁵⁰ They swelled Muslim confidence, and Muslims consequently disseminated reports about these victories. The Muslim victories at Jirba and Gigthis raised Byzantine frustration with Constans' policies among Byzantine elites and expeditionary troops who accompanied him to Sicily. Constans II and his subordinates had not succeeded in developing any successful defense. The vulnerability of North Africa was laid bare. Muslim military pressures grew. Constans II probably did not go to North Africa from Sicily, for it was dangerous to do so, not merely because of danger of exposure to risks of combat in North Africa but also because of fears about dangers of a military or other coup if he moved to Africa or Numidia even for a brief period. It would have been difficult for him to rush back to Sicily to stamp out an insurgency. The very move to North Africa would have tempted attempts at a coup by opportunists and hostile internal constituencies in Constantinople. He could ill afford that risk.

Tripoli's serving as a center for Muslim ships raiding Byzantine territory is notable. The military problem is quite different if Byzantium faced a spread of naval assaults, even if organized fairly locally, on the initiative of and through the very considerable material and human resources that were available to the Muslim governor of Egypt, who would have been able to transfer or switch vessels and skilled crews from Egypt to

⁵⁰ Algerian colonial era texts in French containing alleged traditions that report the Muslim capture of Tebessa and Constantine in 645 and 654 respectively lack any Arabic origins and are at variance with other historical narratives, and accordingly must be dismissed: Cherbonneau 1869: 225-38; Maitrot de la Motte-Capron 1927: 219-35.

service in North Africa, or even to and from north Syria. The dynamics of that kind of situation would have created different pressures for the Byzantines.

The intensification and convergence of Muslim invasions of North Africa in the 660s signaled an end to any hopes that Emperor Constans II or any other Byzantine had succeeded in finding a formula to stave off the Muslims. These penetrating strikes smashed major Byzantine coastal and interior strongholds. During the governorship of Africa of Abū'l Muhājir the Muslims overran much of the province of Zeugitana, according to one reading of sources, and according to another had overrun Cape Bon,⁵¹ further reinforcing their coastal advances. They showed strategic sense. These Muslim strikes greatly increased Muslim military repute, as the Pseudo-Methodius *Apocalypse* testifies. They sounded the end to a lull in hostilities in North Africa. They probably increased dissatisfaction with the policies of Constans II. They were shattering and fatal.

'Uqba b. Nāfi' in the meantime was authorized by Maslama b. Mukhallad governor of Egypt, who had joined Egypt and Byzacium (Byzacena) under his administration, to put down autochthonous unrest in the Waddan area of the interior of Tripolitania, which he did in 667. He then brought with him, reportedly, 10,000 autochthonous or "Berber" converts for his expedition into Byzacena, during which he established an encampment that eventually developed into Qayrawān.⁵² Muslim merchants soon followed to exploit opportunities. They developed trade with Egypt. An early name for this settlement appears to have been Ifrīqiya.⁵³ This was another step in the Muslim absorption of the province of Byzacena (Byzacium) and eventually the old Roman province of Africa.

These Muslim victories marked a change from earlier Muslim strategies of avoidance of the Byzantine-dominated coastline. That also had been their original practice during their invasions of Syria and Palestine: concentration on seizing areas and tribal groupings that were located away from the coasts.⁵⁴ Now Muslims felt sufficiently emboldened to undertake expeditions by land and sea along the coasts of North Africa, and no longer confined their military operations to the interior.

⁵¹ Ibn Abī Dīnār, *Al-Mu'nis* 41. Benabbès 2004: 280–3.

⁵² Mahfoudi, sv. "Kairouan," *EB* 4095–4101. Stories that 'Uqba b. Nāfi' led dramatic expeditions into the desert in Fazzān deserve skepticism: Thiry 1995: 76–89.

⁵³ Rāgib 1991: 3, 9. ⁵⁴ Observations of Donner 1981: 114–19, 153–5.

INTERRELATIONSHIP OF EVENTS

These events require the historian to investigate more carefully the inter-relationship of converging events in Sardinia and Africa and mutual ties and strains. The initial Muslim wintering in Anatolia in 662/3 and the Muslim naval raids on Gigthis and Jirba in 666/7 and defeat of the Byzantine commander Nicephorus in 665/7 and capture of the key choke point of Cululis in Africa by Mu'awiya b. Hudayj are all examples of circumstantial evidence that Constans II at the end of his life had not developed successful defenses to hold off Muslims in the east and in the central and western Mediterranean. The best evidence is that his own failures in his campaigning in northeast Anatolia, in Armenia, by 661 created the conditions that encouraged him to abandon further efforts in the east and to try to improve his fortunes by moving west (Italy) to campaign.⁵⁵ There he also failed.

Decisions and actions of Constans II removed any other internal explanation for Byzantine failures in the face of the Muslims – one could not blame someone or some other group when the emperor was present and took direct responsibility; hence at his death, given the recent record, it was time to reevaluate ecclesiastical policy and that of emperors campaigning in person, even though the founder of the dynasty had set the precedent for doing so.

Tripoli, Libya was probably the starting point for some of these raids in the second half of the seventh century, assisted by resources from Egypt. Mu'awiya b. Hudayj led a raiding expedition that successfully defeated a Byzantine naval expeditionary force as well as overrunning some important fortified points that local Roman-African defenders presumably manned. Evidence tends to help narrow the date for a Muslim naval raid

⁵⁵ Greenwood 2004: 49, n. 103, on same page he proposes a revised date for death of Constans II as 15 July 669. On p. 73 Greenwood reports the progress of Constans II through the Caucasus during the autumn of 659, continuing into spring of 660, confirming his priority to northern military operations. But at the end of the second *fitna* (civil war) in 661 Mu'awiya removed Constans' principal client Hamazasp Mamikonean, whom Mu'awiya replaced with his brother Grigor. Then Constans' network of Caucasian clients unraveled, n. 215 on p. 73: "this would also supply the context for Constans' sudden switch to the western extremities of his empire after 661. His plans in the east had been wrecked and there was no imminent prospect of recovery." All of these points work against the Treadgold thesis on alleged distribution of military lands in that period, see below, pp. 195–7. Constans II was operating from a position of weakness, not strength. There was no evident wholesale imperial distribution of lands for upkeep of soldiers in the east either, and none in Africa. Historians await the results of archaeological investigations by Dr. Gregory Areshian of what may have been the palace of Constans II in Dvin, Armenia, for additional clues to his reign.

against Gigthis to 667, but that does not explain the date for the Muslim raid against Olbia, Sardinia to which the Pseudo-Methodius author also refers. It is not surprising that the Muslim raid struck at the northeastern coast of Sardinia, which lies closest to Italy.

The Muslim raid on Byzantine Sardinia, especially at Olbia, which Pseudo-Methodius listed, probably had implications for the Lombards, whether or not they engaged in any conscious collaboration with the Muslims. Many sailors and members of crews on the Muslim raiding craft may not have been Muslims, but Christians from Egypt or the Levant. The raid against Sardinia underscored the tenuousness of Byzantine power in and near Italy.

The island of Jirba (Djerba) off the coast of Byzantine North Africa bore similarities to Sardinia, although it was much smaller: it was important for maritime trade and industry, was at a crossroads, and had significance potentially as a Byzantine naval base, base for collecting information, and as a place of ultimate refuge. And it could serve as a base for provisions.

All of these reports contribute to understanding the increasingly perilous situation for the Byzantine Empire in the central Mediterranean and explicitly along Sardinian and Italian coasts even earlier than hitherto supposed. Evidently no safe havens remained any more within the central and western Mediterranean regions still under Byzantine authority. However it is not so easy to document the ties or even tacit coordination between military activities of Muslims and western European Christian powers such as the Lombards that some scholars have hypothesized.¹⁶

REEVALUATION OF CONSTANS II

Historians can speculate whether Emperor Constans II might have better appointed his son Constantine IV in his stead to serve as troubleshooter in the west. He needed someone who could unmistakably reassure everyone of the highest imperial commitment to involvement in efforts to hold together the situation in the west. Supposedly his own murder of his brother so poisoned the atmosphere in Constantinople that he believed that he could no longer function effectively there. If that were true then the option of appointing his son Constantine IV would not really have

¹⁶ Bognetti 1966-8: II: 340-1, IV: 288-9, 714-15, for bold speculations about tacit or open ties between Lombards and Muslim Arabs with particular regard to their respective relations with Byzantium.

existed. No trustworthy general existed to whom he could have delegated such formidable powers.

There is no doubt that Constans II inherited his grandfather Heraclius' policies – in contrast to those passive ones of the even more vulnerable Empress Martina and her sons Heraclonas and David who lost power by late 641 – of marshalling armed resistance to the Muslims in Anatolia and in Egypt and presumably any points further west. But this mimetic effort of Constans II had mixed results.

Constans II in Italy and Sicily failed as an emulator of his grandfather Heraclius. He was in fact a failed Heraclius. He did not establish himself for contemporaries or for historical memory as a crusading warrior, and it is easy to exaggerate the crusading credentials of his grandfather Heraclius. Constans II was not a great man, but his personal intervention occurred at a critical time and cannot be ignored. His is an interesting case of the extent to which an individual can be decisive in history. He was unable to reverse longer and broader trends that were permanently and profoundly transforming North Africa. At best his move to Italy and Sicily delayed ultimate outcomes in North Africa by less than ten years.

Constans II suffers from hostile historical traditions. An important source from Italy, the *Liber Pontificalis*, reports that Byzantines under Constans II were unpopular because they were stripping churches in Africa – as well as Italy and Sicily – of wealth:

... ingressus Sicilia per indictionem VII et habitavit in civitate Syracusans et tales afflictiones posuit populo seu habitatoribus vel possessoribus provinciarum Calabriae, Siciliae, Africae vel Sardiniae per diagrafa seu capita atque nauticatione per annos plurimos, quales a seculo numquam fuerant ut etiam uxores a maritos vel filios a parentes separarent. Et alia multa inaudita perpassi sunt, ut alicui spes vitae non remaneret. Sed et vasa sacra vel cymilia sanctarum Dei abstollentes nihil demiserunt

Arriving in Sicily in the 7th indiction he [Constans II] resided in Syracuse and [the Byzantines] imposed such afflictions on the people and inhabitants and landowners of the provinces of Calabria, Sicily, Africa and Sardinia by means of censuses and head taxes and navigation/maritime commercial taxes for many years, which had never occurred before, so even the wives were separated from their husbands and sons from their parents. And many other unheard of things were suffered, so that there remained no hope of life. But they did not even stoop to avoid taking even the sacred vessels and treasures of the saints of God.

Presumably, as in Egypt earlier in the seventh century, Byzantine policy in Italy, North Africa, and Sardinia aimed to spend the seized precious metals and coin to fight the enemies of the empire, whether Persians or Muslims,

so that process of increasing the taxation of ecclesiastical and spiritual resources as well as lay resources was continuing later in the century.⁵⁷ It fits into a much larger pattern, for Rabanus Maurus says Heraclius ordered the stripping of Zoroastrian temples in Persia of silver, gold, and gems back in 627/628/629 in the short period of his occupation of some Sasānian Persian territory.⁵⁸ There was a contemporary and well-founded fear among ecclesiastics in North Africa and Italy that the Byzantine government would continue to expand the process of seizing ecclesiastical wealth that had begun in the reign of Heraclius. That is why the hagiographer Leontios of Neapolis (Cyprus) in the critical years 641–2 is so insistent on explaining why and how John the Almsgiver, the Patriarch of Alexandria, Egypt, and Nicetas, first cousin of Heraclius himself, had clashed and how Nicetas had yielded and ceased attempting to seize ecclesiastical funds and plate.⁵⁹ That was very contemporary with comparable problems of the church in Africa and Italy and elsewhere in the Byzantine Empire.

There is no reason to doubt that this occurred, although the imperial government's reasons are difficult to document. The imperial financial situation was dire. Contemporary Byzantine hagiography offers other confirmation of imperial officials' efforts – in this case in Alexandria, Egypt – to seize church wealth to help pay for imperial expenses.

In fact Leontios of Neapolis' seventh-century biography of John the Almsgiver provides evidence of a very real contemporary concern *c.* 641 that the Byzantine officials were threatening to seize more church wealth. That is the probable explanation for the seventh-century hagiographer's inclusion of examples showing the hazards of seizing such wealth in the recent past, and trying to show that Nicetas, the late cousin of Emperor Heraclius (Nicetas was the father of Heraclius Constantine's wife, Gregoria, who came from the Pentapolis), had first tried to appropriate such wealth, but had then desisted in his dealings with Patriarch John. This is an effort to persuade policymakers, using the precedents of the caution and respect shown by Nicetas for Patriarch John, not to try to seize more church wealth, especially in the form of plate and money. The implication is that there was very real danger of seizures or confiscations in the eyes of ecclesiastics in 641 in and around Constantinople. The hagiographic text reconfirms these other pieces of information and is consistent with what else we know.⁶⁰ The cynic might point out that the Muslim

⁵⁷ *Liber Pontificalis* (Duchesne): 1: 344. Other local fiscal grievances: al-Ṭabarī, *Tarikh* 1: 2818.

⁵⁸ Rabanus Maurus, *PL* 110: 132–3.

⁵⁹ Déroche 1995: 18, 25; Kaegi 2003c: 273–5.

⁶⁰ Leontios, *Vie de Jean de Chypre*, 10 (ed. and comment A. J. Festugière and L. Ryden [Paris: 1974], 356, 456–7). See Kaegi 1998: 1: 51, 57–8; Kaegi 2003c: 25–48, 81 n. 90, 273–5.

conquest would pose a far greater danger to ecclesiastical wealth in terms of moveable and immoveable property than did imperial forced borrowings and confiscations, but contemporary church leaders thought only in terms of recent experiences, not calculations of the future. In fact Muslim authorities in Egypt did later apply pressure on the church to hand over specie, bullion, and other liquid assets.⁶⁴ But Byzantine policymakers had no other apparent option for finding revenues to meet desperate imperial commitments, including pressing military ones.

Resistance to such imperial policies took a number of forms, in terms of the writing and dissemination of hagiographic accounts as well as grumbling and open clashes with the secular authorities. All of that troubled and even poisoned the atmosphere in North Africa on the eve of and during the Muslim conquests. The continuing imperial need to confiscate or borrow church plate and other portable ecclesiastical wealth in the reign of Constans II, as reported by the *Liber Pontificalis*, indicates that Constans II and his advisors had not solved the problem of military financing by the time of his voyage to Italy and Sicily. The persisting complaints about confiscations of church plate are indirect and circumstantial evidence that no major reform of Byzantine military finances had taken place in the west. The ability of Mu'āwiya to escalate invasions of Anatolia to include winter raids after 663 suggests that no satisfactory system of new Byzantine military reform including finance had developed securely in the east (Anatolia) either. Exactly what Constans II was doing in the west is important, but precise information is unavailable.

The head or poll tax imposed by Constans II is controversial. One theory asserts that he copied recent Muslim poll taxes implemented in Egypt.⁶⁵ This speculative theory assumes that Constans II first "possibly" implemented the poll tax in Italy and North Africa, and then extended it to other parts of the Byzantine Empire.

Empress Gregoria, the daughter of the late patrician Nicetas, given her roots in the Pentapolis,⁶⁶ probably took a strong interest in trying to save or recover Byzantine Africa. She probably influenced her young son Constans II to take strong action to save Byzantine interests in North Africa. Her putative and nonidentified estates in the Pentapolis would have been lost early to the Muslims, who overran the Pentapolis in 643. She may have encouraged or inspired directly or indirectly the later Byzantine

⁶⁴ Trombley 2007: 138–9.

⁶⁵ Zuckerman 2005: 81–4; the qualifying phrase "possibly" on p. 84. But Cosentino 2007: 598–600 strongly objects to this hypothesis.

⁶⁶ Nicephorus, *Short History*, c. 17, (64–5 Mango); sv. "Gregoria 3," *PLRE* 3: 547

naval raids against the Pentapolis, especially the strategic area around Barqa. It is difficult to assess her role in Constantinople after the death of her husband Heraclius Constantine, but it is likely that she did influence her son Constans II. She may have stressed her side of the family's North African heritage and its importance, and therefore the need to defend North Africa for reasons of familial interest and tradition as well as to protect the wealth of that great region. But this is speculative. Anastasius, the friend of Maximus the Confessor, may have been the notary for Gregoria's father Nicetas or his wife.⁶⁴

The historian al-Ṭabarī and the geographer Ibn 'Idhārī and other Muslim writers provide a description of an important sequence of events at the beginning of the 660s that fits into this pattern and is understandable only in the context of central imperial pressures on Byzantium to raise money from North Africa and local negative reactions to those imperial policies. It also helps to explain how these conflicting passions created Byzantine internal strife that, interacting with sectarian Christian polemics and genuine ecclesiastical grievances and interests, contributed to hindering the development of a cohesive local resistance to the Muslims. In the words of al-Ṭabarī, who draws on the important but lost history of al-Wāqidī:

The Byzantine Emperor [Constans II] dispatched a legate, ordering him to take [from the inhabitants of Ifrīqiya] 300 qintārs [of gold], just as 'Abdallāh b. Sa'd had done. So he gathered the leading men (*ru'asā'*) of Ifrīqiya and said, "The Emperor has commanded me to take from you 300 qintārs of gold, the same amount that 'Abdallāh b. Sa'd has taken from you." They answered, "We have no money to give. As for what we once possessed, we have used it to ransom ourselves. As to the Emperor, he is indeed our lord, so let him take the portion of our wealth that used to be lawfully his, on the same terms as we formerly paid him every year." When (the legate) heard this he ordered them to be imprisoned. They sent [for help] to a certain group among their associates (*aṣḥābihim*); they came against [the legate] and broke open the prison, so that the detainees escaped.⁶⁵

This simplified story became the core of future elaborations. Thus Ibn 'Idhārī repeats this account, with embellishments:

When Heraclius [Constans II] learned what terms the people of Africa had made with 'Abd Allāh b. Abi Sarḥ he sent to Africa a patrician named Awlima and he ordered him to take 300 qintars of gold just as Ibn Abī Sarḥ took it. And he took

⁶⁴ Boudignon 2004: 31–3.

⁶⁵ Translation is from vol. xv trans. R. S. Humphreys 1990: pp. 23–4. Original: al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh* 1: 2818.

up residence in Carthage. And they told him that, "All of the wealth that we had were ransomed up to the Arabs. As for the Emperor, he is our lord, he would punish us again!" And their leader in this matter was a man named Ḥubāḥiba [more probably, someone called a notable or associate]. And they drove out Awlima the newcomer. They reached the conclusion to accept al-Aṭaryūn [tribune?]. And Ḥubāḥiba [or more probably the notable] went to Syria and reached [Caliph] Mu'āwiya. He described to him the situation in Africa and asked that he send an army of Arabs with him. And Mu'āwiya sent with him Ibn Ḥudayj with a supporting army. That was in the year 45. And Ibn Ḥudayj proceeded until he reached Africa ... And the emperor of Rome sent a patrician named Nikephoros [Nikfur] advancing, it was said, with 30,000 men.⁶⁶

This story is not as improbable as it may seem, even though the underlying Graeco-Roman names Ḥubāḥiba, al-Awlima and al-Aṭaryūn, who may have been a tribune, are uncertain and indeed very doubtful and unhistorical. Ibn Khaldūn provides a different version,⁶⁷ in which he also describes local North African dissatisfaction with excessive centrally imposed Byzantine taxes. The outcome was local rebellion, reimposition of order, and the flight of the disgruntled to gain Muslim assistance. Byzantine and North African unity became even more difficult to achieve, even though the local leader (Ḥubāḥiba or a variant) reportedly died in Alexandria, Egypt and did not participate in the ensuing campaign.

This marked a new stage in the conquest of North Africa. So Muslim sources report the arrival of a leading Byzantine official, a court fiscal official who was chased away by disgruntled local North African taxpayers.⁶⁸ According to al-Ṭabarī, local North African leaders were unwilling and unable to pay another round of duplicate taxes to Byzantine authorities sent by Constans II.⁶⁹ The tradition became muddled and transformed in transmission. One Muslim historical tradition transforms multiple but unnamed local North African notables into one mistakenly named "Ḥubāḥiba," whom later copyists turn into a Jennaha that

⁶⁶ Ibn 'Idhārī, *Bayān* 17. cf. Ibn al-Athīr, *Kāmil* III: 91. See interpretation of Benabbès 2004: 237–41. But could this incident possibly be an echo of the flight in 826 CE of Elpidius, the governor of Byzantine Sicily, who became a rebel, and fled for help to Africa, where he received Muslim assistance, which in fact constituted the beginning of the Muslim conquest of Sicily?

⁶⁷ Ibn Khaldūn, *Tārīkh* II: 549.

⁶⁸ Ibn al-Athīr, *Kāmil* III: 91. Ibn 'Idhārī, *Bayān* 1: 17. Only Ibn 'Idhārī and al-Nuwayrī mention the names "Awlima" and "al-Aṭaryūn" (or Aṭaryūn). The filiation and connections between these later stories and the Wāqidi/Ṭabarī account are difficult to determine. The Wāqidi/Ṭabarī version does not include the element where the leader goes back to Syria. Significantly (because of their critical suspicions about the unreliability of the tradition, or because they draw on different sources?), Ibn al-Athīr and Ibn Khaldūn omit such names, and vaguely refer to a malik and a batriq.

⁶⁹ Al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*: 1 2818.

some nineteenth-century scholars erroneously believed was Gennadius. The name Ḥubāḥiba has no independent confirmation in other known sources.⁷⁰ It is possible that there was early willing cooperation from some unknown Graeco-Latin leaders in Byzantine North Africa who were willing to split off their localities and accept Muslim rule. It is unlikely that Ḥubāḥiba was a slurred Arabic rendering of Ioannes cubicularius, who might have been also *magister militum* of Byzacena;⁷¹ it may be a copyist's error for the vague term *aṣḥābihim* in the al-Ṭabarī tradition.⁷² It is even less probable that Ḥubāḥiba is a distorted Arabic rendering of a late seventh-century name and title mentioned on a lead seal: Ioannes, who was cubicularius, spatharius imperialis and *magister militum* of Byzacena. Some scholars would date him to the late seventh century.⁷³ But nothing conclusive can be said. Caution is best.

There was no Byzantine African Exarch Gennadius in the reign of Constans II, contrary to some modern assertions. The underlying Arabic name may refer collectively to notables or leaders. North Africa had a long period of precedents of internal divisions. This affair requires closer analysis.

It is possible that it displeased Constans II that North African elites made peace arrangements with Muslims, especially ones that deprived his government of revenues that went to the Muslims. He may have still sought to raise some high amount of taxes, whether or not it was equivalent to that which the Muslim commander 'Abd Allāh b. Abī Sarḥ had imposed on Romano-African elites. It is also possible that local inhabitants who drove that exarch out of Carthage chose a new one, whom the same locals then deposed, electing someone else in his stead. Comparable actions were occurring in contemporary Byzantine Italy from time to time, especially at or near Ravenna. This could be similar to hypothesized late sixth-century seigneurial reactions against imperial authorities, which in turn may have resulted in indifference on the part of ordinary cultivators in North Africa. Such conditions could have indirectly lowered incentives for local resistance to the Muslims and thereby facilitated Muslim successes in North Africa as they allegedly did further east.⁷⁴ It is not out

⁷⁰ For an alternative reading and interpretation see Mansouri 2004: 782–6.

⁷¹ "Ioannes 130," *PLRE* 3: 687; Zacos and Vegliery, *Byzantine Lead Seals BLS*, no. 2885. Or it may derive from confused rendering of *aṣḥābihim*, leaders or notables, from the tradition that is recounted by al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh* 1: 2818.

⁷² Al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh* 1: 2818.

⁷³ sv. "Ioannes 130," *PLRE* 3: 687. Zacos and Vegliery, *Byzantine Lead Seals*, no. 2885. Cf. "Ioannes 215," *PLRE* 3: 698. See Laurent *Médaillier*, Seal No. 91, on p. 84 n.1. But some sigillographers, including Dr. John W. Nesbitt, prefer to retain a sixth-century date for this seal.

⁷⁴ Hypothesis of Sarris 2006: 232–4.

of the question that the above-mentioned deposed and disgruntled leader went to Damascus, or otherwise fled to the Muslims, who supported him. Caliph Mu'awiya at almost this same time supported – unsuccessfully – the abortive rebellion of Saborius, commander of the Armeniaks (near Armenian regions of the Byzantine Empire, in eastern Anatolia) against the Byzantines, c. 667–669.⁷⁵ So the story of flight of a disappointed and resentful Byzantine official from North Africa to seek Caliphal assistance, thereby triggering another sensationally successful Muslim massive intervention, is not out of the question, but the true actors remain anonymous.⁷⁶ It would be consistent with Mu'awiya's policies and efforts in the east. It would take place subsequently: the aggrieved Byzantine governor of Sicily, Elpidius, would do it in the 820s, and thereby betray Sicily to the onset of another and later Muslim conquest.

The Muslims accordingly reduced many coastal towns such as Hadrumetum (Sousse) and, significantly, in the interior, Cululis Theodoriana ('Ayn Jallūla),⁷⁷ a key fortress-city on the edge of roads into the mountain passes. This story in several variations probably does reflect some actual conditions and correlates well with Byzantine governmental hostile reactions to local fiscal agreements with Muslims in northern Syria and in Egypt (compare Patriarch Kyros' abortive agreement to buy peace from the Muslims in Egypt).⁷⁸

Several deductions emerge from reflecting on this sequence of events. Sardinia was facing threats from Muslims even before they overran Spain in 711 and the following years. The date for the first Muslim raids against that island is accordingly earlier by at least two decades than previously supposed. It is noteworthy that Byzantine troops from Sardinia, Africa, and Italy successfully joined to suppress the abortive rebellion in Sicily that

⁷⁵ Theophanes, *Chron. AM* 6159 (De Boor 1: 348–51); Michael the Syrian, *Chronique* 11.12 (II: 451–3 Chabot); Kaegi 1981a: 166–7, 182, 201, 234. W. Treadgold has misinterpreted this information, using an old translation into French of some of this material by al-Nuwayri, instead of the better Arabic text of the *Bayān al-mughrib* of Ibn 'Idhārī edited by Levi-Provençal. The actual Arabic text of al-Nuwayri, *Nihāya* of the Cairo edition of 1964–83 is found in vol. xxiv: 18–20. It is from an earlier version of this Arabic text that De Slane composed his old French translation.

⁷⁶ To this extent I agree with Mansouri, namely, that unhappy local elites did take some initiatives to negotiate with Mu'awiya in Damascus. But the underlying story is their discontent with the actual authority in much of Africa – Byzantium. But Byzantium was not all powerful and was unable to prevent such contacts and unable to defeat the Muslims who exploited the unhappiness of North Africans with their Byzantine administrators: Mansouri 2004: 782–6. There may well have been no continuous linear frontier between Byzantium and Islam in Africa during the years 647 to 698, but the Byzantine Empire retained nominal control of many locations.

⁷⁷ Pringle 1981: 196–7. Pringle 2002. Also, al-Bakrī, *Masālik* (Van Leeuwen and Ferre): 685, sect. 1149. Later reference: Ibn Khaldūn, *Ta'rikh* II: 549.

⁷⁸ Interpretation in Kaegi 1998.

supported the usurper Mizizios. Local troops in the central Mediterranean were not so dissatisfied that they joined the rebellion in 668. Instead they remained loyal to the Heraclian house and to established governmental authority. Some might use that point to argue that their grievances had been successfully remedied by Constans II and his advisers' policies. They were still able to engage in successful collective action.

Yet the failure of Gregory at Sbeitla was a warning that the mere presence of a courageous leader close to the battlefield did not assure military success. Constans had many reasons for not landing in person on the North African coast at Carthage and moving inland to assume direct control of defenses against the Muslims. The precedent of Gregory was double-edged: it warned of the danger of neglecting North Africa, but it also warned that personal assumption of the responsibility for the defense of North Africa could not guarantee success and that it could in fact jeopardize the life of the sovereign.

Constans II collided with realities. He failed to equal his grandfather Heraclius' victories and skills in exploiting his enemies' internal strife, and instead in the long run internal Byzantine strife would overwhelm him and kill him. Likewise Constans II did not possess Heraclius' skills in somehow identifying and applying sufficient leverage at key pressure points. He lacked his grandfather Heraclius' rare ability to perceive and take advantage of strategic relationships and timing. He lacked his expertise in coordinating and inspiring complex military units. There is, however, no apocalyptic Muslim or Christian gloating about the death of Constans II, nor did Muslims take credit for his death. Constans II campaigned almost as widely as Heraclius did. However as seen above, matters were falling apart or on the verge of doing so within North Africa and other parts of the Byzantine Empire at the death of Constans II.

Events in Byzacena (southern Tunisia) between 660 and 670 constituted the decisive turning point for the collapse of Byzantium in North Africa. They included the Muslim attacks against Jirba and Gigthis and Cululis ('Ayn Jallūla) and Hadrumetum (Sousse), which probably created the Byzantine frustration with Constans II that culminated in his assassination in 669 in Syracuse. They effected a profound change in the military, political, and religious situation. Gigthis and Jirba were at the center of those events. The second wave of convergent shocks in the middle and late 660s – Gigthis, Jirba, 'Ayn Jallūla (Cululis), Sousse – from the Muslims overwhelmed Constans II as well as much of Byzantine Africa. Some might argue that the death of Constans II, whether or not a consequence of Byzantine frustration or despair after the new wave of shocks from

Muslim military operations, was not very important for North Africa in the larger historical perspective. Some would probably argue that the fundamentals of the dynamics of Muslim advances and Byzantine collapse owed much more to basic trends and conditions than to any man or event, such as his assassination. But the Byzantine military machine of that era did depend a great deal on the emperor to make it work. So it would be imprudent to neglect the disappearance of Constans II in reflecting on the end of coherent Byzantine resistance. Constans II's relatively long rule, from 641 to 669, despite the normal brevity of human life in the seventh century, contributed somewhat to seventh-century imperial stability and survival in the east, despite many controversial dimensions of his reign. He perished prematurely in Syracuse at the age of forty-seven on July 15, 669. In any case after Constans II's death Byzantine and autochthonous resistance in North Africa had to take a different form. The claims for and promises of some kind of imperial renewal or *ananeosis* at the death of Heraclius on the part of his successors Heraclonas, Heraclius Constantine, and Constans II proved to be hollow. By 669, after more than a quarter-century of invocation of renewal or *ananeosis* without evident positive results, no one in North Africa could put much hope in the redemptive potential of such a concept of imperial renewal. Military realities contradicted the dynasty's claims, expectations, and mimetic pretensions.

CONSTANS II AND CONTROVERSIES ABOUT BYZANTINE MILITARY INSTITUTIONAL REFORMS

No evidence exists for any major Byzantine military reform in North Africa on the eve of or during the seventh-century Islamic conquests. W. Treadgold has argued for such a reform at the hands of Emperor Constans II between 659 and 663 in his book *Byzantium and Its Army*,⁷⁹ but erroneously relied on an old and deficient de Slane translation from the Arabic of al-Nuwayrī (1279–1333 CE) in Ibn Khaldūn's *History* that had already been impugned in 1875 by Henri Fournel, in his *Les Berbères* and since then by Idris and other eminent specialists on the history of the medieval Maghrib. Treadgold does not use the original Arabic text, which is from Ibn 'Idhārī, *Bayān*,⁸⁰ in which the names and events are different

⁷⁹ Treadgold 1995: 25, Treadgold 1997: 319–20, Treadgold 2002: 132–3, Treadgold 2003: 95–7. He repeats his confidence about numbers in Treadgold 2005.

⁸⁰ Ibn 'Idhārī, *Bayān* 1: 17. See Kaegi reviews of Treadgold 1995 in *Speculum* 74 (1999): 521–4 and Treadgold 1997 in *BASOR* 315 (1999) 90–2. Fournel 1875–81.

and undermine his entire thesis. But the old translation of al-Nuwayri itself gives no explicit mention of any Byzantine military reform in North Africa. Imposition of stiff payments of tribute by the inhabitants of Byzantine North Africa to the Muslims after 647 probably made any efforts at substantial reform of Byzantine military finance in North Africa a very difficult or at least a very complicated task. No reliable documentation exists for military finance and land tenure in the middle or late seventh century anywhere in Byzantine North Africa.

The attempt to credit Constans II with farsighted military reforms in North Africa involves tempting but convoluted reasoning without supporting documentation. Most specifically, it is unconvincing to attribute the creation of the notoriously controversial Byzantine military themes (military corps and their respective districts), together with major fiscal reform of military financing, to an initiative of Constans II between 659 and 662.⁸¹ The skeptic may ask: does the documentation exist to support this hypothesis? With respect to Anatolia, the earliest sigillographic documentation for the existence of the military institution of Byzantine themes, whatever their nature and scope, dates to the late 660s or, with respect to *strategiai* with a territorial responsibility, even to the eighth century.⁸² This thesis of a major military reform by Constans II assumes the necessity of a top-down great man to institute military reforms, even though the armies and their soldiers and commanders, in the years since the final moments of Heraclius, may well have asserted their own initiatives to support themselves and to increase their influence over policymaking. One need not assume that all power was centralized in the palace in the years that immediately followed 641.⁸³ There is no evidence that any new system of land grants for Byzantine soldiers was created in the final half-century or so of Byzantine rule in Africa, or in seventh-century Italy and Sardinia.⁸⁴ In any case the Byzantine government devised no institutional means by

⁸¹ Important Brandes review of Treadgold 1997 in *BZ* 95 (2002) 716–25, esp. 722–3, and by Carrié and Janniard 2000. On broader issues, Haldon 1997a, Haldon 1999.

⁸² Nesbitt and Oikonomides, *DO Seals*, 3: 144, 4: 54, among other citations, and Vlysidou, Kountoura-Galake, *et al.* 1998: 486–7. By the late sixth century there was a *magister militum* for Byzacena, but that is no evidence for any later themal creation in North Africa. Unconvincing chronology for institutions in North Africa in Zografopoulos 2006.

⁸³ Criticism of thesis of themal reform by Constans II: Zuckerman 2005: 126–34, and criticism of Treadgold for his thesis about themal reforms and numbers in the reign of Constans II, pp. 105–6, but Zuckerman does argue for creation of new Byzantine naval units in the reign of Constans II: pp. 108–25. Cosentino 2007: 601–3 stresses new offensive capacity of the Byzantine fleet under Constans II and possible creation of the so-called Carabisiani, but this reign did not witness the creation of the navy, which already had a long past.

⁸⁴ *Contra* W. Treadgold.

which to check or reverse the Muslims in Africa or the Lombards in Italy. No Arabic text offers details on the financial structure or any other means of support for Byzantine soldiers in Africa (whether Africa Proconsularis, Byzacena, or Numidia), Italy, Sicily, or Sardinia. It is doubtful that Constans II and his officials managed to enforce any significant revenue-raising measures in the fields and hillsides of Numidia, most notably in the Aurasian Mountains.

It is wrong to search for some single great Byzantine military reformer who created the Byzantine themes simultaneously with a comprehensive social and economic reform that included lands and military finance. One plausible and comprehensive study of the Byzantine financial structure argues for a gradual evolution of the Byzantine theme system, including the *kommerkiarioi* and related financial administrative structures.⁸⁵ A contrasting opinion⁸⁶ argues that the emergence of the *genikos kommerkiarios* with an *apotheke* or warehouse was related to fundamental thematic reform and a financial overhaul that took form from the year 656/7.⁸⁷ For one analyst "There is no alternative."⁸⁸ An alternative perspective decisively rejects any imputation of a Byzantine military theme system, even in embryonic form, in the late seventh century.⁸⁹ Another scholar provides additional sigillographic evidence for the emergence of the themes with a territorial basis in Asia Minor only in the eighth century, probably in the 740s.⁹⁰

One interpretation conceives a somewhat different function for the warehouses of *kommerkiarioi* with a radically different chronology, and interprets the process of change as a longer and more complex one. Advocates of Constans II offer new evidence about the warehouses. There is no consensus among numismatists and economic historians in favor of new roles for *kommerkiarioi* and warehouses and reforms by Constans II.⁹¹ Clarity on the issue is imperative. It is reasonable to argue that the reign of Emperor Constans II is an important one for the development of Byzantine adaptations to new difficult military and fiscal realities, most notably to a rising Muslim threat. But the specifics of the chronology and acts of Constans II remain controversial. Everyone concedes that Constans II

⁸⁵ Brandes 2002: 160–5, 418–26, 498–509; and the review by J. Haldon, *BZ* 96 (2003) 717–28.

⁸⁶ Hendy 2002: 1307–70. ⁸⁷ Hendy 2002: 1358–61. ⁸⁸ Hendy 2002: 1370.

⁸⁹ Different perspective: Zuckerman 2005. No evidence exists for the hypothesis that Mu'awiya himself contrived the assassination of Constans II in 669, *contra* Howard-Johnston 2009: 34.

⁹⁰ Jean-Claude Cheynet, "La mise en place des thèmes d'après les sceaux," paper communicated in the *Panels, Programme, 21st International Congress of Byzantine Studies, London 23 August 2006*, publication forthcoming.

⁹¹ Metcalf 2000: 151–2.

was a courageous emperor but was he anything more than that? There is no supporting evidence from Byzantine North Africa for major agricultural or military financial reforms on his part at that time. It is of course possible that the failure of Constans II in North Africa and elsewhere stimulated his son Constantine IV and other officials to work harder to reshape administration to become more effective, so in that sense these developments contributed to the emergence of a more effective Byzantine defense, including the institution of the themes.⁹²

Byzantine North Africa has served as a putative explanation for scholars who search for the originator or origin of Byzantine institutional reforms. If unification of civil and military powers were able to solve Byzantine problems of security, then the creation of the exarchate of Africa back in the late sixth century in the reign of Emperor Maurice (582–602) would have rendered the search for the creation of any new theme system or military lands unnecessary. But that explanation has been unsatisfactory. The supposed creation of new yet undocumented military reforms in Africa between 659 and 662 is even less satisfactory to explain changes in seventh-century Byzantine institutions and military finance both inside and outside of Byzantine North Africa.

Arabic sources provide no detailed information about seventh-century Byzantine military and fiscal institutions in North Africa. The core of opposition to Muslims in North Africa came from autochthonous populations in the Eurasian Mountains without documented support from any newly created and identifiable supporting Byzantine institutions. Autochthonous armed resistance to Muslims received encouragement from Byzantines (vaguely called *Rūm*) in the form of advice and perhaps (but undocumented) financial aid, but not from any new Byzantine military or other institutional structures. Late historical memory within Muslim North Africa claimed that local resistance in North Africa fragmented after the military catastrophe and death of Gregory at Sbeitla. Autochthonous tribes then ceased to fight in any common mass resistance, but retired to their own regions and resisted with the assistance of attachments of "Franks," an anachronistic and quaint term for Latinized or Roman or Byzantine military who were concentrated along the Mediterranean coast.⁹³ It is unclear what form Byzantine military institutions would have taken in North Africa, if they had been created (other

⁹² Just as failure in crusading in Egypt stimulated Louis IX to reshape royal administration in France: Jordan 1979: 135–220; Wood 1989: 397–9.

⁹³ Ibn Khaldūn, *Ta'rikh* vii: 10, also p. 9.

than the exarchate, which had existed for many decades before the Islamic expeditions and which did not prevent or check them). The sources, both Latin and Arabic, only report local frustration with and hostility to Constans II's policies and management. They may reflect bias against the Heraclian dynasty and its Monotheletic policies, but that is what remains in extant historical traditions.

*Muslim interests, calculations,
and leadership*

Muslim motivations with respect to Byzantine North Africa deserve some reflection, although explicit contemporary documentation does not exist for perspectives in Damascus, Alexandria, and Fustāṭ (Old Cairo).¹ Considered in a larger framework, Muslim conquests were not simply frontal confrontations as some modern historians perceive them, nor for twenty-first-century investigators were they, as some later pious Muslim historians describe them, quasi-miraculous and ultimately divinely ordained.

The initial conquests, including those in North Africa, had a centralized impetus but were carried out ad hoc. They were undertaken by Muslims to realize some kind of general vision of how the world should be.² Muslims also presumably did not wish the Byzantines in Constantinople to draw on the revenues of North Africa to finance their resistance to Islam in the east, that is, in Asia Minor, or to use it to finance or serve as a base for their expensive warships that might well raid Muslim-controlled Egypt or other coastal areas.

Muslims cannot have been oblivious to Byzantine strategic calculations. Byzantine naval raids targeted Muslim-controlled ports and headquarters in Egypt, part of the coast of Cyrenaica, and the coasts of Lebanon and Syria.³ Byzantine raiders sought to inflict casualties, to disrupt communications, supplies, daily life, and political administration, and to force Muslims to divert human and material resources to the safeguarding of regions remote from the North African provinces of Byzacena and Zeugitana. Any sensible Byzantine strategy strove to deny the Muslims good harbors and bases. However Muslim objectives in North Africa did not strictly conform to Eurocentric perspectives. They did not seek

¹ I thank F. Donner for judicious advice on the following pages.

² Donner 2010a: 87–8, 142–4; Donner 1995; Kennedy 2007.

³ Rejecting existence of a strong and effective Byzantine fleet is Zuckerman 2005: 108–25. But Cosentino 2007: 601–3 is skeptical of this hypothesis.

primarily to seize areas of North Africa that were closest to Italy and the rest of Europe. Instead their primary objectives were territories that were most vulnerable to their expansion and that could be conquered, occupied, and raided with the highest payoffs for the risks taken.

It is possible that Byzantine activity in the Barqa region of Cyrenaica reflected not only perceived opportunities for raids against Muslims but also the impulse to touch on old ties of the Heraclian dynasty, namely the family of Gregoria, wife of Heraclius Constantine, which may have had associations in Cyrenaica, as well as those of Heraclius' father-in-law Rogatus, whose precise North African regional ties are unclear.

Muslim strategic reasoning took account of Byzantine objectives and methods. The caliphs did not necessarily have any clear plan or clear knowledge of the full impact of their raids in North Africa, which might have been embarked on partly or even mainly because these lands were the most proximate or next objective rather than that they fit into some preconceived plan.

Whether the Muslims realized it or not, forcing the Byzantines to expend resources on, pay tribute for, or even just to defend their territories in North Africa was depriving them of funds that would otherwise be used to finance opposition to Muslim invasions in Anatolia, or even to finance Byzantine raids into northern Syria or against upper Mesopotamia or Armenia. Muslims benefited from raids that slowly bled the Byzantines and their North African subjects and allies. Seizing or neutralizing the vast wealth of North Africa served the Muslims in several ways.

SIGNIFICANCE OF EGYPT AND ITS FAILURE TO PROVIDE A MODEL

Muslims who invaded North Africa already had their experience in conquering and administering Egypt behind them. But Egypt, with its unique dependence on the Nile, its density of population in the Nile valley, its Coptic population, its canals, Alexandria, its absence of natural topographic defenses, its extensive revenues and records of revenues, and its different written and spoken languages, was different.⁴ It was difficult to apply many of the lessons learned in Egypt to the situation in North Africa. Modifications were necessary. More immediately relevant were the unrecorded experiences and logistical efforts of Muslims who overran and managed to maintain, more or less, control of coastal Cyrenaica

⁴ Petry 1998: I: 1-85.

and Tripolitania and their hinterlands after invading from Egypt. It is there, in the region that has become Libya that they developed arrangements with local tribes that were not really comparable to the situation in Egypt. Muslims in Egypt would have learned much about North Africa, but the experience and intelligence that Muslims procured in Cyrenaica and Tripolitania were more relevant. Logistical challenges were different in North Africa from those in Egypt because the long raids launched from Egypt required lengthy and difficult logistical arrangements. In Egypt, in contrast, the Muslim armies were able to feed their soldiers from the land pretty easily. The seizure of Egypt provided the Muslims with crews, ships, and naval options on which they could draw after they consolidated their control of Egypt and especially its great port of Alexandria.⁵

The Muslim conquest of North Africa is inconceivable without Egypt's serving as the Muslims' rear base.⁶ Supplies of leather and iron were essential, although it is difficult to calculate the quantities needed and equally difficult to calculate procurement.⁷ Trade quickly developed between newly founded al-Qayrawān and Egypt. Merchants followed the victorious warriors. Whether by abandonment, seizure, or sale, pieces of the former Roman-African culture and economy were dismantled and recycled by the conquerors and those who followed in their wake. In at least one instance, for example, a page probably from an elaborate Latin Biblical codex was reused for practical correspondance by a Muslim merchant who was engaging in seventh-century commercial transactions between al-Qayrawān and Egypt.⁸

FORMATION OF EARLY ISLAM AND EMERGING PERSPECTIVES ON THE STRUGGLE WITH BYZANTIUM

Two basic issues are very controversial, complex, indeterminate, and poorly documented: the condition of Islam, and the situation of Muslims contemporary with the early Muslim expeditions into North Africa. Islamicists remain locked in fundamental debates about these two issues. Many western critics believe that Islam was still in the process of formation, that believers in what some might call embryonic or proto-Islam were

⁵ Haas 1997. On Egypt's furnishing crews for military service in North Africa at the beginning of the eighth century, Becker and Bell 1911: 279. Trombley 2004.

⁶ Brett 1978: II: 512, conceives of an "Egyptian aristocracy" that dominated the Islamic polity in North Africa.

⁷ For speculations about needs for leather in early seventh-century military campaigning in Syria: Crone 2007.

⁸ Rāġib 1991. Remarkable early document.

still in the process of sorting out and achieving their identity distinct from Judaism and Christianity.⁹ Some Muslim traditionalists vehemently reject such an interpretation. Developments were in flux. Much of that controversial early process of formation of Muslim communal identity occurred in Arabia and Syria.¹⁰ But even more relevant for this study is the meaning of Islam for early Muslims in Egypt and the earliest regions of North Africa that became subject to Muslims coming from Egypt.

Of course, this investigation can in no way contribute to the difficult investigations and debates about the nature and origins of Early Islam. But it must take account of uncertain premises and the dangers of retrospective interpolation of later historical and religious concepts, assumptions, and frames of reference into the middle and late seventh century.¹¹ It is unclear whether the earliest Muslim campaigners in North Africa were motivated by notions of *jihād* or not, and it is likewise unclear what Islam meant to them and their leaders. Textual analysis and archaeology have not clarified these issues. *Jihād* apparently emerges as a doctrine in the late eighth century.¹² No one suggests however that North Africa was the locus of the formation of Early Islam, for the key developments in the formation of Islam occurred elsewhere to the east of Egypt.

Muslim traditions ascribe much decision-making concerning North Africa to commanders of the Believers who resided at Madīna (Medina) or Damascus or elsewhere in the east. The actual process of Muslim decision-making and undertakings may in fact have been more complex. Initiatives may have originated in Egypt or among commanders in Tripolitania and later in Byzacena and then received caliphal ratification *ex post facto*. Tradition attributes a cautious stance to 'Umar and even initial hesitation on the part of his successor 'Uthmān on the issue of invading Byzantine North Africa.¹³ Traditions ascribe no threat to the Muslims from the

⁹ Donner 2002-3; D. B. Cook 2002a; Robinson 2003; Griffith 2008. A different interpretation of the blurring and drawing of religious boundaries and identities between Christians and Muslims: Sizgorich 2009: 12, 31, 119, 146-91.

¹⁰ Implausible and fanciful hypothesized formation of Islam in Nevo and Koren 2003 rests on an inaccurate understanding of Byzantine history and Byzantine-Arab relations.

¹¹ Important memorandum on the state of some debates: Crone, "What do we actually know about Mohammed?," 2006-08-30 <http://opendemocracy.net>.

¹² Later formalization of *jihād*, with some Qayrawānī traditions: von Bredow 1994. Formulations concerning holy war after the seventh century: Bonner 1992, repr. in Bonner 2005: 401-27, and Bonner 2006. D. B. Cook 2005: 5-48. Firestone 1999. North Africa is not the focus of these valuable publications or of Johnson and Kelsay 1990; Kelsay and Johnson 1991; Noth 1966.

¹³ Skepticism about any initial caliphal authorization for 'Amr b. al-'Āṣ to undertake the Muslim conquest of Egypt: Noth, with Conrad 1994. Doubts for other stories about 'Umar's and 'Uthmān's hesitations concerning expeditions into Africa. 'Umar: G. Della Vida and Michael Bonner, sv. "'Umar (I) b. al-Khaṭṭāb," *EP* 10: 819 warn, "Arabic sources tend to ascribe a greater

inhabitants of North Africa. But the forceful and astute governor of Egypt 'Amr b. al-Āṣ pressed for an aggressive policy of expansion west, according to some traditions.¹⁴ Islamic historians and their sources may have striven retrospectively to provide some caliphal authorization and approval to what was, as in the case of the conquest of Egypt, a policy pushed by local military commanders, not central authorities.

But in some fashion the formation of Islam very significantly contributed to making what otherwise might have been ephemeral raids by tribesmen and even chaos into a new and transformed complex political, administrative, and social order and civilization. It is the task of historians of Early Islam to elucidate that process. It is possible here only to examine some events from the limited perspective of Late Antiquity and Byzantium while taking note of the changing and evolving process of twenty-first-century historical criticism of Early Islam inside and outside of North Africa. Rigid models of Early Islam can obfuscate the matrix of the conquest of North Africa from the Byzantines. Again, what Islam was and what it meant to Muslims inside and outside North Africa is for Islamicists to debate and resolve. Yet historians cannot forget that the leaders and core contingents of Muslim expeditionary forces received inspiration from a religious movement that brought some cohesion, new frames of reference, motivation, and order. Whether or not at the beginning there was a new affiliation in the sense of religious community is a subject of scholarly controversy.

Later historical memories and tendentiousness cannot be allowed to distort historical realities. But critical analysis is easier to invoke than to accomplish. No contemporary documentation exists to prove that any coherent mature conception of *jihād* had emerged by that time or that it was the dominant stimulant for the seventh-century Muslim conquest of North Africa. The routinization of and institutionalization of Muslim military operations had occurred by the second half of the seventh century.¹⁵

Internal Byzantine strife about Christology rendered even more unlikely any accommodation between Christians and early Muslims. Christian doctrinal boundary lines that initially may not have been stringently drawn became more so as the Byzantine imperial leadership strenuously competed with its opponents for the mantle of doctrinal

degree of control to the caliph than was technically and perhaps even politically feasible at the time ...” Also, Donner 1995 and Donner 2010b.

¹⁴ Ibn A'tham, *Kitāb al-Futūḥ* II: 357–8; Benabbès 2004: 212–14.

¹⁵ Synthetic interpretation of the processes: Donner 2010a: 80–2, 109–18, 136–55, 161–77, 194–224.

correctness. Yet boundaries between Christians had been a subject of acerbic strife since the third century CE. It is far from certain that there ever was in the Maghrib much possibility for hypothetical easy accommodation to take place between Muslims and Christians. Muslims arrived in North Africa at a moment in which substantial constituencies of Christians had already been fighting among themselves fiercely concerning the drawing of boundaries for the faithful. It is difficult to conceive that Christian antagonists would concede more readiness to allow doctrinal and practical compromise with newly arrived Muslims than they allowed in their intra-Christian contentions. Whatever fluidity existed swiftly disappeared as the imperative for the delineation of demarcations strengthened, especially under imperial pressure. This did not eliminate the possibility for pragmatic short-term truces and diplomatic relations.

A retrospective reading of the sources, from the perspectives of the ninth and tenth centuries, envisaged the conflict between Byzantium and Islam as an inevitable one of two titans. One modern interpreter of the broader corpus of Muslim geographical and historical texts pithily concluded that there was room in the Mediterranean and Levant for only one empire, and the issue was which (Byzantine or Muslim) would be the survivor from a struggle between the two of them: "Where do you come from and who put you on my path, which of the two of us was created for the ruination of the other one?"¹⁶ This savant reiterated, "The history of Islam and Constantinople would only be achieved with the ruin of one or the other."¹⁷ In that analyst's eyes, and according to him, in the eyes of Muslims "at every moment, Byzantium was the most powerful enemy, the most stubborn, the number one enemy. From the infancy of Islam, and even before its birth, it was there, blocking the way."¹⁸ These stark remarks refer to the broader sweep of Muslim-Byzantine relations, especially with respect to the eighth through tenth centuries CE, and not primarily to the situation in seventh-century North Africa, but they have relevance for North Africa. Of course the retrospective reading does not give genuine insight into the middle and late seventh century, when contemporaries may well have seen things differently. Yet it is admittedly difficult to see

¹⁶ Miquel 1967-88: II: 384. Miquel eloquently sketches Byzantium in the eyes of Muslim authors, II: 381-481. However at times Miquel, despite his consultation of some excellent Byzantinists, displays an obsolete and inaccurate knowledge of Byzantine history. A superior interpretation in El Cheikh 2004.

¹⁷ Miquel 1967-88: II: 480. ¹⁸ Miquel 1967-88: II: 477.

how a violent resolution could have been avoided.¹⁹ Events and decisions in the following decades would determine the outcome.

ISLAMIC STRATEGIC CULTURE AND STRATEGIC OPTIONS

Any attempt to define a "style" of Islamic strategy faces challenges,²⁰ but its key features would involve (1) broad conformity to imperatives and constraints of the principles of Islam, including efforts to spread it by force where appropriate; (2) heavy reliance on a combination of military measures and persuasion and diplomacy to achieve goals; (3) accordingly, (a) heavy efforts to split opponents on and off the battlefield and locate those who will negotiate terms of separate peace with Muslims and (b) allowing opponents the alternative of negotiated submission and survival, in order to reduce the likelihood of costly, bloody resistance to the death; (4) but, also not inconsistent with the above, an emphasis on destruction of the enemy's fighting forces and key strong points to cause overthrow of his equilibrium, rather than initial efforts to control the mass of opponents' population; (5) close consultation, to the extent practicable, between field commanders and the highest Muslim leadership; (6) avoidance of positional warfare²¹ except where necessary if forced on the defensive; (7) desire to force opponents into decisive battles but avoidance of slow siege warfare; and (8) possession of a strategy that allows the relentless exploitation of military victories to unfold and branch new strategic goals consistent with the previous ones accomplished.

Seventh-century Muslim strategies in the east included resort to a number of options. Muslims were effective in stripping Byzantine defenses by varying their expansion through military force and combinations of diplomatic and military negotiation. And many communities just capitulated without a fight. Muslims displayed (1) readiness to engage in decisive combat and prevail there; (2) readiness to negotiate separate terms with local civilians; and (3) readiness to negotiate separate terms with local military commanders. However this dual process of negotiation ceased to work effectively as Muslim armies attempted to penetrate and establish permanent control north of the Taurus and Antitaurus Mountains in Asia

¹⁹ But it is inappropriate to invoke here the old cliché that Byzantium served as the bulwark that saved Europe from Islam. That kind of rhetoric has been out of place, deservedly, for many decades.

²⁰ Solid synthesis: Kennedy 2001: 1–58. Also relevant for broader concepts: Johnston 1995: 36, 61; Snyder 1990.

²¹ Fighting to hold territory, usually from fixed, fortified positions, in contrast to mobile warfare.

Minor (Asiatic Turkey). Some of the strategies and techniques for struggle against Byzantium in the east also found application in Muslim conquests and expansion in the Maghrib. Muslim military activity in the Maghrib did not take place in a vacuum. It benefited from experience in the east. Some strategies proved to be more effective in North Africa than in the east. Other important parts of Africa, such as the important Niger bend, lay outside of early decision-making and probably awareness. It is unclear why there were no Muslim campaigns against Ethiopia, which was a relatively wealthy polity.

Problems of exchange of Byzantine and Muslim prisoners and outright hostages were not unique to North Africa in the Umayyad period.²² Much of the negotiation about them in the seventh and early eighth century took place either at Damascus or at Constantinople, not in the smaller provincial localities (except for ad hoc local exchanges). Negotiations required the consent and decisions of the leaders of the respective states, not local commanders. The process emphasized that effective foreign relations remained the prerogative of the Umayyad leader at Damascus²³ and the Byzantine emperor at Constantinople, and their respective authorized envoys. Neither party made any ultimate theoretical or religious concession in making accommodations to political realities.

MU'ĀWIYA'S AGGRESSIVE STRATEGY

Some broader frameworks, extending outside North Africa, are necessary. Critical for the fate of North Africa were the decisions and perspectives of Mu'āwiya, governor of Syria and later caliph,²⁴ who had developed experience in fighting the Byzantines and gained unusual familiarity with their territory. Tradition reported that Mu'āwiya's last advice was "Tighten the noose around the Byzantines, for then you will have other nations in your power."²⁵ Muslims followed Mu'āwiya's counsel as they shaped their policies in North Africa and the western and central Mediterranean. Summer raids or *ṣā'ifa* against Byzantine-occupied Anatolia started in Mu'āwiya's governorship of Syria from approximately 640 CE on. They normally proceeded from northern Syrian or northern Mesopotamian towns (Hims, Antioch, Malatya) and used mountain passes in the Taurus such as the

²² Rotman 2004: 67–93. ²³ Hawting sv. "Umayyads," *EP* 10: 840–7; Hawting 1987.

²⁴ Best biography: Humphreys 2006.

²⁵ "The Umayyads in the History of Khalifa b. Khayyāt," trans. Wurtzel, 135–60. Arabic text: Khalifa b. Khayyāt, *Ta'rikh* 143.

Cilician Gates (from al-Maṣṣīṣa or Mopsuestia and Tarsus) or further east, the pass of al-Ḥadath between Maʿash and Malatya. Most significant is the early raid by the Muslim commanders Abū'l A'war al-Sulamī and Wahb b. 'Umayr in AH 23, or 644 CE, against the important Byzantine Phrygian city of Amorion.²⁶ Whether or not he personally joined this expedition, Mu'āwiya personally participated on other expeditions into Byzantine Anatolia. From those experiences in Anatolia, after the death of Heraclius in 641, at the very moment in which Byzantine resistance was beginning to harden on the plateau, contemporary with the obscure yet important efforts of the Byzantine Emperor Constans II to fortify cities and strongholds and develop a coherent resistance, Mu'āwiya learned how to fight and negotiate with the Byzantines. He probably also learned to appreciate their terrain and the problems and challenges of the climate and logistics in Anatolia. He and his commanders utilized that experience in conceiving and managing Muslim campaigning in North Africa. Probably no other caliph acquired so much personal military experience in fighting against the Byzantines. Affairs were in flux when Mu'āwiya was governor of Syria and caliph. Although it is conceivable that the Byzantines could have collapsed at that time, they did not.

Mu'āwiya's aggressive strategy attempted to exploit a number of Byzantine vulnerabilities. He followed a strategy of relying on the unexpected and exploiting dangerously false and smug Byzantine assumptions about Arabs. In the years between 661 and 680, Muslim raiders frequently embarked on winter expeditions into Byzantine Anatolia, and starting in 663 some of them actually passed the entire winter there. In addition to the obvious goal of bringing the reality of war into the Byzantine heartland, that strategy almost certainly counted on taking advantage of the normal arrogant Byzantine assumption that Arabs, like the earlier Byzantine stereotypes of the Persians, could not fight in cold weather and instead became phlegmatic. He sought to stabilize Syria's frontiers rather than conquer new territories, but he left the initiative for North Africa, and Iran, in the control of his local governors in Egypt and Iraq.²⁷ He resorted to a war of attrition against the economic and social bases of Byzantium.²⁸

²⁶ See Kaegi 1977. For other references to this tradition, also from the traditionalist Layth b. Sa'd (713–91): Ya'qūb b. Sufyān Fasawī, wrongly entitled al-Basawī, d. 277/890, *Kitāb al-ma'rifa wa-al-tārikh*, ed. A. D. al-'Umarī (Baghdad: 1974–6) 111: 307; Ibn Ḥajar al-'Asqalānī, *Al-Isāba fi tamyiz al-ṣahāba* (Cairo 1939), 2: 533. On Layth b. Sa'd: A. Mérad, sv. "Layth b. Sa'd," *EI*² (2nd edn. [1986]), 5: 711–712; Khoury 1986; Khoury, "al-Layth b. Sa'd," 1981: 189–202.

²⁷ Persuasive observations of Humphreys 2006: 50, 106.

²⁸ Humphreys 2006: 108.

Muslim winter expeditions into Anatolia brought home to the Byzantines just how erroneous their stereotypes were about Muslim practices of making war. The winter campaigns were costly to both sides, but they unquestionably deeply disturbed the Byzantines and compelled them to stay on the defensive. It was, however, a risky strategy to gamble the lives of Muslim soldiers in a totally hostile environment for a prolonged period.

Moreover, the Muslims probably also profited from doing the unexpected in other ways. There was no tradition of Arab or Muslim seafaring. Yet Muslims undertook naval expeditions in 649 and 653 (objective: Cyprus), 654 or 655 (naval victory of Phoenix or "The Battle of the Masts" off the southwestern coast of Anatolia), 673 (raid against the island of Rhodes), and a lengthy unsuccessful assault and naval blockade on Constantinople from 674 to 678. There may also have been some kind of a land raid and naval expedition that penetrated almost to Constantinople in 655, but it was no formal siege. Byzantines received some warning about some Muslim preparations for these expeditions, but the Muslim decision to embark on combined naval and land strategies, especially under the sponsorship of Mu'awiya, underscored the readiness of Muslims to adapt to new strategies and techniques of war. At this date, the Muslims were still innovating and surprising their opponents. Warfare in North Africa fit into this larger military context.

Mu'awiya's motives included assertion of his leadership in Islam by dint of authorizing deep penetrations into Byzantine territory and expeditions with Constantinople as the objective. He also may well have sought to increase the loyalty of his troops and officers by holding out the possibility of significant honor and material gains from fighting the Byzantines. Such measures also kept them busy. Mu'awiya set important precedents for aggressive leadership and aggressive actions against the Byzantines, even though he engaged in truces and diplomacy with them when he calculated that it served his interests or was otherwise necessary.

Mu'awiya probably perceived through his diplomacy with the unsuccessful Byzantine rebel Saborius, strategos of the Armeniaks, that there were serious fissures within Byzantine ranks, including rebellious sentiments and significant military forces. Muslim sources report unrest among North Africans but do not pretend to give any hints of knowledge concerning how imperial fears about the possibility of rebellion could affect policymaking in Constantinople and Syracuse.

A different outcome might have occurred in North Africa in the initial decades after 647, at the start of Muslim raids. Historical memories and

later Qayrawānī traditions have obliterated many traces of what once was an ambiguous and potentially fluid situation with various options. One can conceive of an intermediate status for North Africa between Islam and Byzantium. In such a scenario North Africa's inhabitants would have paid some substantial kind of tribute or indemnity to the Muslims, as all agree was the case in the years that immediately followed the Muslim victory over Gregory at or near Sbeitla. However, such a mixed or shared status, not necessarily one of some kind of condominium, could also have involved the North Africans' remaining in some fashion subjects of the Byzantine emperor and also owing some kind of fiscal as well as political and military responsibilities to the Byzantine Empire. Mu'āwiya permitted or experimented with such joint arrangements at precisely the same time for the island of Cyprus in 649 and 653.²⁹ The details of arrangements in mid and late seventh-century Cyprus remain unclear to modern historians. They never worked perfectly. Such a Cypriot-like mixed scenario is not reported in North Africa, even though Mu'āwiya might have allowed it in the initial decades of Muslim operations west of Tripoli.

IDENTIFYING THE TURNING POINT: HISTORIOGRAPHICAL DEBATE

The references in some Muslim historical and geographical texts to the unwillingness of some constituencies within the North African elites to pay taxes to both Muslim and Byzantine authorities may not be entirely fanciful but rather reflect glimpses of part of a blurry and fluid period in which the political and fiscal situation might have evolved in other ways. That is consistent with interpretations of some fluidity in Early Islam of the seventh century that indicate a relative openness of Believers to Christians. That option closed by the end of the 660s, after the decease of Constans II and after the new string of decisive Muslim North African victories at Cululis, Gighthis, and Hadrumetum (Sousse), and especially after the triumph of 'Abd al-Malik b. Marwān over his rival Ibn al-Zubayr in 692. Unlike Cyprus, North Africa was not an island, and its conquest involved ultimately contiguous territory of far greater dimensions and geographical conditions which Muslims could find ways to adapt to and overcome. Events took their course and the ambiguities and any potential

²⁹ Beihammer 2004: 61–3. Older synthesis: Averil Cameron 1992a: 32, 42, who emphasizes some contrasts between the African and Cypriot situations.

for different outcomes dissipated. It is unwise to speculate on counterfactual outcomes.

The failure of the Muslim blockade and siege of Constantinople in the years 674–8 marked the high point of Mu'āwiya's efforts to seize Constantinople, even if there were an earlier probe by land and sea to its vicinity in 654–5. Its failure aided Byzantine morale, and for some Muslims it became part of a legend. There followed the second Muslim or Arab civil war,³⁰ which provided a very welcome breathing space for Byzantines.

Some scholars see a turning point in the earliest Muslim–Byzantine encounters in 678–9 CE. The failure of the Muslim assault or blockade of Constantinople caused Mu'āwiya to purchase an expensive peace from Constantine IV, in AH 60 (680 CE), costing 3,000 gold pieces, 50 slaves, and 50 horses. The Byzantine Empire observed those terms during the caliphate of Yazid I.³¹ However it is an exaggeration to claim that the Arab failure at Constantinople in 678 impelled them to push west in the Mediterranean, for a strong impetus westward from Egypt was already there.³²

Mu'āwiya's offensive campaigns against the Byzantines resulted in no permanent Muslim conquests in Anatolia (Asia Minor) between 643 and his death in 680, in contrast to Muslim acquisitions in North Africa.³³ There were almost annual Muslim raids, sometimes in the winter, sometimes in the summer, in fact sometimes raids during both seasons in the same year – even penetrations up to a thousand kilometers deep into Anatolia. Many of these raids into Anatolia started from the Syrian nodal point of Ḥimṣ (the ancient city of Emesa), while others jumped off from Antioch still further north. These raids at a minimum contributed to the prestige of Mu'āwiya, but they also enriched Muslims, attracted even more tribesmen to participate, and seriously harmed their Byzantine opponents who suffered devastation of territory, loss of property and human lives and captives, and diminution of commerce and agriculture. The total Muslim casualties probably remained relatively modest. Of course these operations also kept the Byzantines off balance by diverting their attention to defense and removing any hope of embarking on major offensive strategic policies and campaigns against Muslim Syria.

³⁰ Rotter 1982. ³¹ Beihammer 2000a: 328–34, with references.

³² The always insightful Lemerle 1957: 717 argued that the Muslim failure at Constantinople in 678 "est à l'origine de la conquête du bassin occidental de la Méditerranée par les Arabes."

³³ Brooks 1898; Kaegi 2008; Bonner 2005: xiii–lv. Also O'Sullivan 2004.

Although they accomplished no permanent strategic goals, the Muslim raids into Anatolia compelled their Byzantine opponents to devote much time and effort to developing counterstrategies. Mu'āwiyā's governorship of Syria and his caliphate did accomplish some extension of Muslim territorial controls: Cyprus and most of Armenia fell under Muslim influence. In addition, the almost constant Muslim military pressure on Byzantine Anatolia had another conscious or unconscious strategic effect: it paralyzed the Byzantine government's ability to do much in defense of extremely exposed positions in North Africa, especially the coastal areas near Carthage and the coastal strip from Carthage to the Straits of Gibraltar. In other words, Muslim pressure on Anatolia, Cyprus, and other eastern Mediterranean and Aegean islands smoothed the way for the Muslim attainment of another strategic goal, the eventual conquest of the extensive and rich North African littoral. The Byzantines could only manage to hold North Africa with modest commitments of troops and ships because of the Muslim threat to core areas of the Byzantine Empire in the east.

Warfare several thousands of miles away in northeast Anatolia had implications for the outcome of events in North Africa in the 660s. The traditionist Ibn Sa'd, *Kitāb al-Ṭabaqāt al-kabīr*, reports that the first establishment of a Muslim winter quarters in Anatolia, *ard al-Rūm*, occurred in AH 42 (between April 26, 662 and April 14, 663 CE): "And the Muslims wintered in the land of the Byzantines in the year 42 and this was the first winter quarters/winter camp [*buwa awwalu mashtan*] they wintered in it."³⁴ He does not identify the expedition's leader or leaders or where they wintered or other details such as the number of raiders or their provenance.

The issue and initial date of Muslims' establishing winter quarters in eastern Byzantine territory are important. That development made life and agriculture in Anatolia more perilous for the Byzantine inhabitants than were the summer raids. But it also was risky for the Muslims to attempt it.³⁵ The first Muslim winterings added an inducement for the Byzantines to tighten up their defenses of Anatolia. It may help to explain or date the background for the emergence of the Byzantine military "themes" (military corps and their districts).³⁶ The Byzantines proved unable to prevent such winterings. On the other hand, the

³⁴ Muḥammad b. Sa'd, *Kitāb al-Ṭabaqāt al-kabīr*, ed. E. Sachau (Leiden: 1905–40) v: 166 = newer Arabic printing under title *al-Ṭabaqāt al-kubrā*, 9 vols. (Beirut: 1957–68) v: 224.

³⁵ For a survey of raids, but use with caution: Lillie 1976: 63–155, 346–51; cf. Kaegi review 1978.

³⁶ Brandes 2002, for a searching investigation of interrelationships between the slow evolution of fiscal and military institutions; Haldon 1993. Also, Nesbitt and Oikonomides 1994–2005, vols. II–IV. See also Lampakes 1998; Vlysidou *et al.* 1998; Tsiknakis 1997.

successes of the Muslims there were limited. Their winterings resulted in no permanent Muslim occupation of significant territory or strongholds on the Anatolian plateau.

The termination of the Muslim caliph Mu'awiya's truce (this truce had been made in May–June 662, after that of 657–8 had ceased) with Byzantine Emperor Constans II in 662, after the end of the Muslim civil war, created the opportunity for Mu'awiya to undertake a more active military approach to Byzantine Anatolia.³⁷ The truce of May–June 662 was soon broken when Constans II departed for the west, probably immediately following June 662. That chronology, however, is not without its problems. Mu'awiya may well have wished to demonstrate his piety and religious zeal by escalating hostilities.³⁸ Furthermore, the stunning departure of Constans II from Constantinople with some of his best troops for mainland Greece, Italy, and Sicily c. 662–3 created an opportune moment for the Muslims. They would not have wished to allow the Byzantine Empire to grow stronger, for that could only harm themselves in the long run. Their goal was to topple it. The date for the first “wintering” was not an accidental or random one. After this first expedition in AH 42/662–3 CE, Muslim winterings in Anatolia became common. This had implications for Muslim strategy and campaigning in North Africa.

Constans' absence from Anatolia encouraged even more Muslim raids there between 662 and 663 and his own death in 668. Muslim sources do not explicitly mention Constans' departure for the central Mediterranean, but their deep and relatively successful raids indicate a coordination of their activities with his absence. One can only speculate about what would have happened if he had remained longer in Sicily or elsewhere in the central and western Mediterranean. His absence also coincided with exponentially bolder Muslim raids, namely winter-long ones, in Asia Minor, with devastating consequences for the inhabitants.³⁹ The 662–3 period was thus a watershed in the intensification of Muslim military pressures on many fronts against the Byzantines, now that the Muslim civil war (*fitna*) had terminated, thereby releasing human and material resources for employment against Byzantium. Convergence resulted: the

³⁷ Kaegi 2004. New studies on Mu'awiya: Keshk 2002; D. B. Cook 2002a; Polat 1999; Humphreys 2006.

³⁸ Beihammer 2000a: 313–14; also Kaplony 1996: 48–9. Beihammer's analysis seems the most plausible. Useful material in Crone and Hinds 1986.

³⁹ Constans II departed for Italy and Sicily in order to strengthen Byzantine military defenses in the west: Corsi 1983: 85–96, 117–18. More romantic narrative: Hodgkin 1967: vi: 269–79.

fortunes of Asia Minor, Africa, Sicily and Sardinia became more tightly interrelated. Historians should try to conceive of a larger framework for looking at the seventh-century experiences of Africa and Sardinia and Sicily.

The earliest raids against Sardinia by the Muslims were not random or purely opportunistic. They appear to be consistent with intensifying Muslim pressures against the Byzantines on many fronts: Africa and Asia Minor by land, and Sicily and Sardinia by water. The menace of the Lombard King Grimoald to Byzantine power in Italy added still more hostile pressure. The growth of Muslim power in Africa and Byzantine internal political and ecclesiastical strife permitted the emergence of a Muslim military threat to islands such as Sicily and even Sardinia even before the Muslims had completed their conquest of the coast of North Africa and before their crossing from North Africa into and consolidation of power in Spain. The ultimate respective fortunes of the inhabitants of Sardinia, Sicily, Africa, and Anatolia were to be different, but those outcomes were still unclear while Muslim battering was still intensifying on all those fronts in the final decades of the seventh century. The precise details may never be fully known and understood, but we need to rethink some assumptions about the broader contours of events, especially those around 662–3 and their aftermath.⁴⁰

Whatever his administrative undertakings, Constans II did not create an extremely effective defensive themal system in Anatolia between 659 and 662. It is true that the Muslims did not succeed in seizing a permanent base north of the Taurus Mountains, but somehow the Muslims were able to initiate Anatolian winter campaigns in 662/3 and managed to continue them thereafter. The Byzantine Empire succeeded in surviving those challenges, but at a very high cost in terms of men and money paid for peace. It could have been worse. Some may argue that the existence of Muslim raiding starting in 662/3 could even be regarded as a kind of circumstantial proof of the effectiveness of the hypothesized new Byzantine theme system. But aggressive Muslim winter campaigns in Anatolia did not merely start and take place only in 662/3, for they continued for the next decades. So if the creation of the theme or themal system was effective in stiffening Byzantine defense of Anatolia, which is unproven, it found only a limited success in the 660s and 670s.⁴¹

⁴⁰ Oikonomides 1964. ⁴¹ Kaegi 2003b.

ASSESSING MUSLIM MILITARY LEADERSHIP IN
NORTH AFRICA: THE CAMPAIGNS OF
'UQBA B. NĀFI' AND ABŪ'L MUHĀJIR

Caliph Mu'āwiya appointed the strong-minded, even headstrong, 'Uqba b. Nāfi' and sent him westward to North Africa with 10,000 troops from Egypt, in 669/70. He was a nephew of 'Amr b. al-Āṣ on his mother's side. It was he who commanded the Muslims who founded, in AH 42, what was to be Qayrawān.⁴² He also around 670 subjugated regions in Byzacena that included the isolated oasis town of Tusuros (modern Tozeur).⁴³ But Mu'āwiya recalled 'Uqba in 675 and replaced him with Maslama b. Mukhallad al-Anṣārī as governor of Egypt. Maslama sent his *mawlā* or client Abū'l Muhājir to Africa.⁴⁴ It was Abū'l Muhājir who conquered the Cape Bon peninsula (in what is Tunisia) or, according to another interpretation of the Arabic term Jazīra, he captured much of the province of Zeugitana (the former Africa Proconsularis). 'Uqba visited Mu'āwiya and complained of his mistreatment and of Abū'l Muhājir's mismanagement at Qayrawān. His complaints were fruitful. Mu'āwiya accordingly reappointed 'Uqba in AH 62 (681 CE).⁴⁵ 'Uqba returned and restored Muslim settlement to his original site at Qayrawān, which Abū'l Muhājir had changed.

Byzantine imperial leadership appears to have developed little direct military experience in Africa. In contrast Caliph 'Abd al-Malik b. Marwān had personally campaigned there in the 650s as a young man, as apparently had his father Marwān b. al-Ḥakam.⁴⁶ So had his rival 'Abdallāh b. al-Zubayr. 'Abd al-Malik thus had some grasp of local conditions in North Africa, most notably in central and southern Tunisia (Byzacena, Byzacium). He in particular knew some personalities, roads, and topography. That may have helped the Muslims in the final decades of the seventh century although sources do not put any emphasis on it. Muslims had the edge in terms of informed decision-making at their top levels of leadership. Whether anyone in Medina or Damascus really made operational decisions for Muslim campaigns in North Africa is uncertain, despite

⁴² Al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh* II: 93 de Goeje; Khalīfa b. Khayyāt, *Tārīkh* 129. Ibn Abī Dīnār, *Al-Mu'nis* 41. Ibn Khaldūn, *Tārīkh* IV: 222, dates to AH 45 (665 CE).

⁴³ Al-Tijānī, *Rihlat al-Tijānī* 162. Benabbès 2004: 362-7.

⁴⁴ Al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh* II: 94 de Goeje = *Between Civil Wars: The Caliphate of Mu'āwiyah*, trans. M. Morony (Albany: 1987) vol. XVIII: 103; Ibn Abī Dīnār, *Al Mu'nis* 41. Ibn Khaldūn, *Tārīkh* IV: 222, dates to AH 55 or 674 CE.

⁴⁵ Ibn Abī Dīnār, *Al Mu'nis* 41-42. On topography, Benabbès 2004: 280-3.

⁴⁶ Robinson 2005. 'Abd al-Malik was born c. 645 CE.

traditions that Muslim commanders in North Africa sent reports to top leaders. But it helped the Muslims to have leaders who had some hands-on experience in North Africa. From virtually the beginning of campaigning the Marwānids placed their stamp on Muslim expeditions into North Africa. The name of Marwān b. al-Ḥakam himself, as well as his wealth, was associated with campaigning in Africa, according to some traditions that circulated in North Africa. Muslim leaders could make better decisions and explain matters more intelligently and convincingly to those who would implement those broader commands. They were familiar with some commanders and some of their fighters who themselves probably remembered that they had once fought at these leaders' sides. That probably contributed positively to Muslim morale. It is impractical to achieve any detailed understanding whatever of how decisions were reached and implemented, given the paucity of reliable sources.

Ibn al-Zubayr and Marwān b. al-Ḥakam and his son 'Abd al-Malik b. Marwān all received fame and additional wealth from their victorious military campaigning or raiding in North Africa. This added wealth and prestige encouraged them and strengthened their material resources for waging civil war. Already Mu'āwiya had received additional prestige and wealth from the North African expedition of 'Abd Allāh b. Sa'd b. Abī Sarḥ, and indeed 'Abd Allāh b. Sa'd b. Abī Sarḥ supported Mu'āwiya in his civil war with 'Alī. It is impossible to quantify precisely the incremental funds that partisans injected from North Africa into the first and second civil wars, but it was considerable by any reckoning. The revolt of Ibn al-Zubayr (680–92) against the Marwānids suffered, in turn, from blockage of any continuing flow of funds from North African expeditions. Instead, such funds flowed into and swelled the coffers of the Marwānids, who were the rivals of Ibn al-Zubayr, and probably provided them with decisive additional resources.⁴⁷ This was another constituent of the dynamics of the Muslim conquest of North Africa that lay beyond the ability of the Byzantines to control and shape.

Much of Muslim raiding in North Africa up to the late 660s had concentrated on militarily vulnerable regions and fortified urban agglomerations near if not on the Mediterranean coast. While the directions of that original thrust continued in the 670s and 680s, a very different new center of gravity and expansion also developed: lower Numidia. It was

⁴⁷ It is inappropriate here to digress into a detailed inquiry into the early Muslim civil wars, but one must not forget the implications of booty and triumphs in North Africa for some of the competitors in the late seventh century.

more tempting to raid and expand into the attractive rolling pasture lands of lower Numidia instead of attempting to reduce well-defended towns and difficult terrain of parts of Zeugitana and the even more difficult terrain of coastal Numidia. Local defenses in coastal regions could gain Byzantine reinforcements and provisions by sea.

Lower Numidia posed challenges to Muslim expansion. The Muslims discovered themselves facing North African resistance from autonomous and autochthonous tribal entities in the Eurasian Mountains once they penetrated the territories that those tribes regarded as their own. Overcoming that challenge would require the development of different strategies, policies, and diplomacy. The Muslims found Byzacena (southern Tunisia) and southern Numidia more attractive for their military operations than the north of Numidia, where the reduction of mountain fortresses required lengthy sieges, skills with military engineering, overcoming possibly inclement winter weather and hardships related to winter, such as mudslides, snowstorms, fog, and cold. The plains of lower Tunisia and the plains north of the Aures Mountains in Numidia had the kind of terrain with which Muslims were already familiar. They could cope better with challenges there. It was easier to maneuver there than in the treacherous mountain passes and during the harsh winters of northern Numidia. They saw opportunities and took them. That is the likely reason for the Muslims' concentration of early major military operations and settlement in the south of Tunisia and Algeria, namely, southern Numidia, instead of in the northern regions.

The Muslims in North Africa also benefited from a central position, as they did in their previous invasions of Palestine, Syria, and Egypt. The Muslims enjoyed the initiative. Increasingly after the end of the 660s they were pushing their opponents in North Africa into reacting without possessing a good grasp of the larger picture. That is, Byzantine and autochthonous defenses became localized: unwieldy, gangly, disconnected, fragmented, and lacking coordination, sometimes perhaps even confused. One modern authority on the Aures commented: "What created the weakness of Byzantine Africa is the fact that, in the agglomeration of cities that it formed, each one is independent and organizes its defense without any coordination with the others."⁸ The Muslims' opponents still possessed strong positions in well-fortified cities and fortresses and in regions such as Numidia where formidable topographic obstacles worked in favor of defenders. But the logistical problems and topography impeded

⁸ J. Morizot 1991: 60.

speedy and accurate communications and decision-making on the part of the Byzantines and autochthonous peoples. These instead worked to the advantage of the Muslims.

Caliph 'Abd al-Malik b. Marwān purchased protection or insurance in the form of an expensive peace from Emperor Constantine IV in early 685 because of internal Muslim strife in Palestine and elsewhere in the east.⁴⁹ The situation in North Africa was not the focus of this diplomatic activity. Other pressures influenced 'Abd al-Malik. Constantine IV had penetrated as far as the important Cilician fortress of al-Maṣṣiṣa (Mopsuestia). However he did not take the opportunity to push further into Muslim Syria or for that matter Africa, perhaps even to win it back, at a very vulnerable moment for Caliph 'Abd al-Malik because of domestic conflicts. Maybe Constantine IV himself was in poor health or maybe he feared plague that was raging in Muslim territories. In (7 July?) 685 'Abd al-Malik b. Marwān requested renewal of the peace because of the Arab civil war and because of Khazar pressure in Armenia and Constantine IV's raid toward Mopsuestia. These developments raised the cost for maintaining peace to 365,000 gold pieces, 365 slaves, and 365 horses. Similar terms were renewed in 689. But those terms did not necessarily apply to North Africa.

Events in the east (Anatolia, Armenia) took their own course while Muslim forces in North Africa increased pressure on weakening Byzantine and irregular autochthonous resistance. In 687 Emperor Justinian II sent Leontius to Armenia with a strong expeditionary force. In 690 Caliph 'Abd al-Malik subjugated Antioch, which may have fallen out of Muslim hands because of the raiding by the Mardaites (*al-Jarajima*) and because of the distractions of Muslim internal strife. A second truce between Byzantium and 'Abd al-Malik took place at the end of 689 or beginning of 690.

Caliph 'Abd al-Malik achieved many of his objectives against Byzantium although he did not radically alter the borders in the east, which had remained for a half-century within approximate parameters established at the beginning of the 640s along the Taurus and Anti-Taurus range. The end of the second *fitna* or Muslim civil war in 692 allowed a significant turn to be taken. But it would not be until the reign of Caliph Sulaymān, followed by 'Umar II,⁵⁰ that another major effort would take place to combine Muslim naval and land forces to threaten the core of eastern Byzantine territory, including its capital of Constantinople, between 716 and 718.

⁴⁹ Beihammer 2000a: 343–51; Kaplony 1996.

⁵⁰ Cobb, sv. "'Umar (I) b. 'Abd al-Aziz," *EP* 10: 821–2.

'Abd al-Malik was unable to accomplish the kinds of deep penetrations of Byzantine territory in Anatolia that Muā'wiya and his commanders had in previous decades. 'Abd al-Malik concentrated his military actions on border areas. These were relatively effective but limited in scope. But in the west his caliphate oversaw the virtual eradication of Byzantine authority in North Africa. His leadership bore some indirect responsibility for ultimate success. Events in the east had consequences for the struggle in North Africa, yet local military leaders of Muslims in Africa were able to continue and extend their initiatives even when internal difficulties in the east impeded and complicated direct assistance to them from Damascus and Madīna (Medina).

The shift to tribal resistance 669–95

Byzantine authority deteriorated rapidly in the provinces of Africa (Zeugitana) and Numidia following the death of Emperor Constans II in 669, even though the final pockets of Byzantine, Byzantine-inspired, and Byzantine-allied resistance in North Africa took more than three more decades to disappear. No historical tradition in any language records any new Byzantine military successes in battle against the Muslims in North Africa or even the devising of any line or system of resistance or major program of fortifications, except for the admittedly noteworthy but mostly autochthonous resistance under the respective leadership of Kasila and Kâhina. Few regular Byzantine troops in North Africa appear to have been allied or served with those autochthonous forces. Definitive statistics do not exist. Furthermore one cannot trace any neat line of Muslim–Byzantine territorial control in North Africa at the end of the 660s or soon thereafter. There was no linear demarcation.

The withdrawal of elite Byzantine expeditionary forces from Sicily and Italy after the death of Constans II removed a key qualitative and mobile component of the defense capabilities of North Africa and increased the exposure of Byzantine Sardinia as the Muslim threat loomed greater. There is apparently no mobile backup to counterpunch or to plug gaps in Byzantine defenses after the assassination of Constans II and the apparent return of crack Byzantine troops to the eastern Mediterranean. The activities and efforts of Constans II never eliminated the risk of conspiracy and in fact probably increased its likelihood. The elimination and deaths of Pope Martin I and Maximus the Confessor settled nothing within the ranks of dissenting Christians. Yet the Byzantine political and military situation in North Africa was not hopeless after 647 or even after the death of Constans II. A lot of North African territory and numerous valuable ports remained nominally subject to Byzantium, but the issue was whether Byzantium or local North African leadership or the two parties together could invigorate and coordinate resistance there successfully.

COLLAPSE OF BYZANTINE AUTHORITY:
IMPERIAL RESPONSIBILITY

By 669 responsibility for Byzantine mistakes in North Africa no longer belonged, if it ever had, to locally based secular and ecclesiastical leaders. It fell directly on the imperial government and its officials. Their efforts had not worked hitherto. And the decisions of the Sixth Ecumenical Council of 680 at Constantinople, which decisively and permanently reversed imperial policy on Christology, including Monotheletism, by reaffirming Catholic and Chalcedonian positions, did not turn political and military fortunes around in North Africa. The reversal of ecclesiastical policy occurred too late to affect the dynamics of Muslim expansion. Moreover, decisions in Constantinople concerning Christology probably meant little to critical decision-makers within the ranks of autochthonous tribal leaders. Awareness and effects on local public opinion remain unclear. In fact the swathe of destruction wrought by Muslim commander 'Uqba b. Nāfi' at the start of the 680s, after the imperial government and the church had abandoned Monotheletism, underscored the lack of any connection between Christology and Byzantine North Africa's military fortunes in the face of the Muslims.

After the death of Emperor Constans II in Syracuse, Sicily, on July 15, 669, it is difficult to conceive of much aid coming to North Africa from the central imperial government at Constantinople. Constans II's capable son and successor, Constantine IV (669–85), had his hands full in the east with growing Muslim threats to Anatolia and Constantinople itself and various internal threats to his authority. Initially he faced the abortive rebellion of Strategos Saborius out east in the Armeniak Theme, which he successfully suppressed.¹ Nevertheless Constantine IV was unable personally to visit the west nor could he allow diversion of desperately needed resources to regions with lower priority. Probably he did not share his father's great emotional ties to North Africa, who, given the embittered succession struggle of 641 in which he had triumphed, was vividly aware of his side of the family's North African ties. He had no personal familiarity with North Africa. The Carthage mint followed the practice of Constantinople in portraying Constantine IV more martially than his familial predecessors, specifically in military

¹ Theophanes, *Chron.*, AM 6159 (De Boor: 350–1; Mango and Scott 489); Kaegi 1995: 227–9. See Figure 8.



Figure 8 Solidus of young Constantine IV. Constantinople. Date 668–73.
DO Cat 2,2 n. 4.1 BCZ 48.17.2293.D2009. ©Dumbarton Oaks,
Byzantine Collection, Washington, DC.

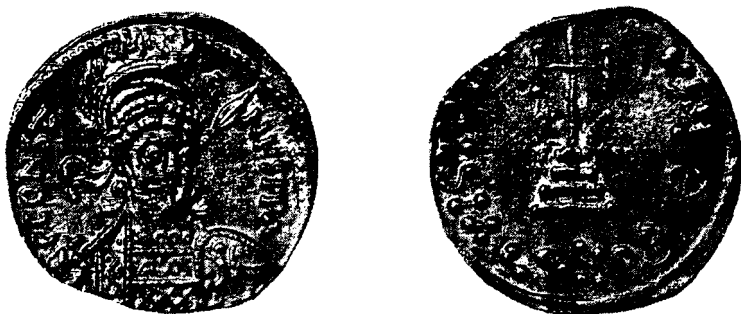


Figure 9 Solidus of young Constantine IV. Constantinople. Date 681–5.
DO Cat 2,2 n. 14c BCZ 48.17.2303.D2009. ©Dumbarton Oaks,
Byzantine Collection, Washington, DC.

dress (helmet, shield, breastplate) and with a transverse spear behind him (see Figures 8 and 9).²

Probably this transformed facial (obverse) portrait on the coinage reflected a wish to emphasize armed resistance by the emperor against his enemies everywhere, not merely in North Africa. Likewise the Constantinopolitan mint continued to strike silver hexagrams in his name. The inscription on the hexagrams continued to ask that God help the Romans.³ But minting such militant messages on coins solved nothing,

² Morrisson *BN Cat* I: 374, 385–6, Type 3 p. 385 *N* 04–08; Type 4 p. 386 *N* 09–11, *AR* 01–02 p. 386; bronze Type 2 p. 387, *Æ* 01, 04, 05.

³ Hexagrams struck under Constantine IV: *DO Cat* 2.2, Nos. 21.1–27.1, pp. 534–6.

and there is no way to ascertain whether it encouraged any additional North African patriotism or the will to resist.

No emperor from Constantinople again visited the central or western Mediterranean until the unsuccessful Palaeologan emperors' efforts to find western assistance at the end of the fourteenth and beginning of the fifteenth centuries, and those later efforts did not involve North Africa. The second Muslim or Arab civil war, or *fitna*, provided a brief respite for Byzantium. During that period from 680 to 692 Umayyad Syria was unable to send much aid to the Muslims who sought to finish the job of conquering North Africa. Once the civil war in the east had terminated in 692 CE, the situation from the Muslim point of view was ripe for the conclusion of their conquest of Byzantine North Africa.⁴ The rise of a Bulgarian menace in the Balkans just south of the Danube from the beginning of the 680s added still more pressure on Byzantium and calls for redeployment of precious and scarce Byzantine troops, making it even more difficult for Constantinople to find sufficient human or material resources to dispatch for the defense of its territories and authority in remote North Africa.⁵

Byzantine resistance to Muslims in North Africa no longer centered on the presence and attention of an emperor in a nearby Sicilian port. Some scholars would argue that resistance to the Muslims in Africa had ceased to be Byzantine well before 669, that it had already become primarily the responsibility of African elites, whether landowners or townspeople and autochthonous peoples, not Byzantine military or civilian officials.⁶

Byzantine mobile forces remained a formidable proportion of the military forces that opposed Muslims as late as the death of Constans II in 669 and probably somewhat longer, although it is impossible to assign a simple convincing cutoff date. A lead seal attests to *Theoktistos praepositus ... and magister militum per Numidiam*, but probably in the late sixth century.⁷ The terminology is very traditional, with no hint of any major military reform in the direction of the genesis of themal institutions, for example. The vacuum in the command of Byzantine resistance coincided with Muslim penetration west of the Tebessa Mountains and into territories of Byzantine Numidia that autochthonous tribal groupings regarded as

⁴ Anonymous, *Akkbār majmū'a fī fath al-Andalus*, ed I. al-Ibyārī (Cairo: 1981): 13–14. Landau-Tesseron 2000: 210–12.

⁵ Fine 1983: 33–72; Curta 2006: 79–83.

⁶ These Maghribi scholars include Mansouri 2004, Aibeche 2007 and 2009, and to a lesser degree, Benabbès 2004 and 2005.

⁷ Use with caution Zografopoulos 2006: 88.

their own.⁸ The commander in chief of the remaining Byzantine forces is unidentified. It does not appear that autochthonous Eurasian tribes had participated directly in warfare against the Muslims until the latter trod on their lands, which had lain effectively outside of Byzantine control for a long time.

Byzantine North Africa's officials and generals still theoretically controlled vast swathes of potentially defensible territory after 669. In principle many Numidian towns possessed solid walls and towers for self-defense. Mila, Constantine, Tebessa, Ad Dianam (Zana, Diana Veteranorum), Timgad, and Baghai, among others, had fortifications, as did Medauros and Tubursicu Numidarum (Khemissa). The Byzantines may even have added emergency fortifications to protect some buildings at Diana Veteranorum at this time.⁹ The question was the inhabitants' determination to resist and their readiness to pull together with the empire. The imperial government could not afford to send troops to cover all of the gaps in the defense of the Aures and Hodna Mountains. That would depend on local contributions. Numidia was isolated and none of its ports compared with Carthage. The tough terrain and the example of Anatolia indicate that it would have been possible in theory to develop an effective resistance against the Muslims in at least part of North Africa, but that did not materialize.

It may be debatable whether local North African political and military leadership had become autonomous after the battle of Sbeitla in 647. However autonomous or uncoordinated, local leadership both Romano-African and autochthonous became the principal feature of defenses after or soon after the assassination of Constans II in Syracuse in 669. An appropriate description might be fragmented or discordant agency. Local leadership had not remained autonomous earlier in the 660s, when evidence exists for an intermediate period of coordination of military movements by those loyal to Constans II, perhaps for five years or so. Different North African regions and provinces devised their own policies against the Muslims or for negotiating with them and for relations with autochthonous peoples.¹⁰ It is difficult to identify who was really in charge in North

⁸ Some modern Amazigh scholarship is excessively exuberant. One needs to exercise caution in handling issues of autochthonous resistance in the absence of explicit documentation. The center of seventh-century autochthonous resistance to Muslims lay in the Aures, in the south, not in the Kabylie or Petite Kabylie to the north, in Numidia, a center of current popular and Amazigh promotion and activism.

⁹ Oral estimation of Y. Modéran after visit with W. Kaegi to site of Zana on June 9, 2005.

¹⁰ Ibn Khaldūn, *Ta'rikh* VII: 10.

Africa. Policies and preferences in Constantinople were another matter. The precise activities of the local military commanders in Byzacena, whether or not any *magister militum* of Byzacena existed, are unknown, as well as the date of the disappearance of that command.

A large number of strategic Byzantine fortresses existed in the region around Thagaste, the birthplace of St. Augustine. Some of those well-placed fortresses, such as Gadiavpala (Ksar Sbahi), controlled key crossroads and gave excellent surveillance. Medauros and Tubursicu Numidarum (Khemissa) had extensive walls. The countryside around Thagaste is very fertile. It was a region worth conquering. The Mediterranean coast is not far away from Thagaste. In that territory there is much cultivation of olive, fruit and nut trees, and cereals as well as the raising of sheep. There are Numidian rolling plains with grain from Thagaste all the way west to Setif. No sources report that any decisive events occurred in this region during the process of the Muslim conquests. The towns and countryside associated with St. Augustine's youth, education, and his episcopacy receive little or no mention in accounts of the Muslim conquest. It was a region through which Muslims passed. There were no decisive battles or sieges nor did any dramatic defense operations emerge here.

An excess of narrow provincialism and short-sighted concentration on local interests and a lack of concern or interest in the welfare of the whole of North Africa may have hindered development of effective defenses for Numidia. Possible explanations for these attitudes may be that the inhabitants of Numidia were isolated or simply cared little about the fate of other parts of North Africa. Hilly terrain, difficult and slippery tracks, and treacherous winter weather hindered easy communications between Numidia's ports and the fortresses and inhabitants of the interior. It was difficult for the imperial government, which depended heavily on its domination of the coasts and sea lanes of the Mediterranean, to develop and maintain contact with potential resistance in the interior. It was tempting to believe or hope that local fortresses or the sheer heights and precipices of Constantine could enable inhabitants to resist on their own. Each area apparently thought of its own problems and interests. The defense of Numidian fortresses appears to have devolved on local responsibility for the most part by the seventh century.¹¹ That was also the case for contemporaries in remaining Byzantine-controlled areas of the Balkans. Locals could expect little from Constantinople.

¹¹ Such was the retrospective conclusion of Ibn Khaldūn, *Ta'rikh* VII: 10.

There was apparently no effort to assemble mobile forces to try to lure the Muslims into an engagement or to try to search them out and destroy them east of the mountains of Tebessa. That had been tried unsuccessfully at the battle in the vicinity of Sbeitla and no one tried to repeat it. Tebessa was a critical road junction but no record of its fate exists.¹² Its retention by a strong Byzantine force was essential to prevent penetration of Muslims through the vital Kasserine–Tebessa Gap into lower Numidia. Yet Tebessa could not have served as the headquarters for coordinating Byzantine defenses in North Africa or even in Numidia against the Muslims. It was too far from other Byzantine bases even though its retention was essential for a viable Byzantine defense of Numidia and Africa Proconsularis (Zeugitana). No precedents existed in Byzantine or Roman memory for a protracted Roman defense of Numidia, except for historically remote and dubious cases of Numidian kings (e.g., Masinissa, Jugurtha, Tacfarinas) with whom Romans and Byzantines probably could not have conceived any identification or commonality. The resulting defense was passive and reactive and disjointed. In historical retrospective, the great North African Muslim historian Ibn Khaldūn viewed the multiple and intractable tribal and familial affiliations in North Africa as the explanation for the slowness and difficulty with which Muslims accomplished the conquest and reduction of North Africa and its population.¹³

CAMPAIGNS OF ABŪ'L MUHĀJIR

It appears, according to the early Muslim historian Khalīfa b. Khayyāṭ al-'Uṣfurī (d. 854), that unidentified Byzantine or other authorities at Carthage signed a treaty in approximately 678 CE with Muslims that covered Africa/Zeugetana and may have given some kind of Byzantine recognition to Muslim control of the former Byzantine province of Byzacena. The catalyst was an expedition in strength by the able Muslim commander Abū'l Muhājir to the vicinity of Carthage. The vulnerable Byzantines reacted by making some kind of agreement that conceded Byzacena to Muslim control which, if the interpretation of Jazīra really means the province of Zeugetana, committed the Muslims to evacuate the province

¹² Maitrot de la Motte-Capron 1911: 49 and 256 that Muslims destroyed Tebessa in about 669 CE without stopping there. Presumably in connection with 'Uqba's raid on Qastiliya, Gafsa, and the Jarid. But he gives no sources.

¹³ Ibn Khaldūn, *Ta'rikh* 1: 174, 394.

of Zeugitana (old Africa Proconsularis).¹⁴ The situation was fragile and very precarious for the Byzantines.

However this apparent agreement of 678 in some fashion released the resourceful Muslim commander Abū'l Muhājir to raid Numidia or parts of it, possibly areas that were effectively out of Byzantine control. He then moved west from the province of Zeugitana or Byzacena and proceeded to raid and negotiate with local inhabitants. He established himself at a place in the direction of "Tlemsan," (which copyists may have miscopied for Lamis, whether it once referred to Lamasba, Lambaesis or Ksar Belezma or some other post) at 'Uyūn Abī Muhājir ("Sources of Abī Muhājir"), which remains unidentified and disputed, for about two years. Its location apparently was about two stages from Constantine.¹⁵ Two years is an extensive period of time. Abū'l Muhājir was astute and supple. During that campaign he expertly dealt with many "*ajam*," a vague term that could designate autochthonous people, in particular Kasīla the Aurasian, who apparently had his base somewhere in the Aures region, probably near Tubna.¹⁶ This raises the question why did the so-called Byzantine-Muslim treaty or arrangements of 678 at Carthage not also protect Numidia, which was part of the Byzantine Empire, unless it did not apply to Numidian regions under the de facto control of some hostile local leaders or hostile autochthonous tribes? The *magister militum per Numidiam* may simply have refused to respect that agreement concerning Byzacena and Zeugitana. Or there may have been a complete collapse of coordinated Byzantine resistance in North Africa, leaving each region and its local leadership to make its own arrangements with the Muslims, which was precisely the opposite of the earlier policies and wishes of Heraclius and Constans II.

Abū'l Muhājir had made peaceful terms with autochthonous tribes in the Gafsa area of Byzacena (southern Tunisia) and then also with the Aurasian tribal leader Kasīla and his forces.¹⁷ Kasīla appeared around 683. The fate of any Byzantine office of *magister militum* in Byzacena at that relatively late date is unknown. The source of Ibn al-Athīr reports that

¹⁴ Khalīfa b. Khayyāt, *Ta'rikh* 139; Ibn Nāji, *Ma'ālim* 1: 46. Benabbès 2004: 278–83, for the meaning of Jazīra.

¹⁵ Ibn Abī Dīnār, *Al-Mu'nis* 41–2. Ibn Nāji, *Ma'ālim* 1: 46. Ibn Khaldūn, *Ta'rikh* IV: 222, VII: 90, refers to penetration by Abū'l Muhājir as far as Tilimsān (Tlemsan, Tlemçen), which probably reflects confusion with earlier textual reference to the controversial place name Lamis.

¹⁶ Al-Mālikī, *Ri'yād* 1: 33. Convincing case for Aurasian, not Moroccan or far western, origins: Modéran 2005. Modéran sv. "Koçeila (Kusayla, Kasīla)," *EB* 425–64, *contra* M. Talbi, "Kusayla b. Lamzam," *EP* 5: 517–18.

¹⁷ Ibn Khaldūn, *Ta'rikh* IV: 222.

Kasila had sincerely converted to Islam, presumably due to the shrewd efforts of Abū'l Muhājir,¹⁸ who skillfully pioneered techniques for winning over autochthonous leaders and their groups.¹⁹ But puzzling aspects remain. It is impossible to calculate how numerous these autochthonous forces were. This was a potential breakthrough for the Muslims west of the Kasserine–Tebessa Gap. Abū'l Muhājir, perhaps in the year 679 CE, raided into Numidia as far as two sites that have been interpreted as 'Uyūn Muhājir, and then Mila, but the identification of both sites is uncertain.²⁰

The source for the diplomatic and religious successes of Abū'l Muhājir is the respectable and relatively early historian Khalīfa b. Khayyāt al-'Uṣfurī. His report requires serious consideration. Mila in his narrative may refer to the Mila northwest of Constantine, the Roman Milev. But that assumes a Muslim expedition by Abū'l Muhājir north of Constantine without knowing what other logistical bases were seized to support an expedition that reportedly lasted two years. The *Ṭabaqāt al-'ulamā' Ifriqiya wa-Tūnis* written by Abū'l 'Arab dates the second expedition into North Africa of Abū'l Muhājir to AH 57 (677 CE),²¹ without saying anything about his possible military operations in Numidia. Perhaps the author excludes information that does not directly bear on Qayrawān. Mila could refer to another site called Mlili south of the Aures near the late Roman post at Gemellae, which some have identified as Meleon, which could easily become Mlili in transcription.²² There may be other possibilities.²³

Until recently the only reference to Abū'l Muhājir's capture of Mila was thought to be found in a dubious fifteenth-century history of

¹⁸ Ibn al-Athīr, *Kāmil* IV: 107; Fagnan trans. "Annales du Maghreb et de l'Espagne par Ibn El-Athir," *Revue Africaine* 40 (1896): 370.

¹⁹ Marçais 1953: 14, "Abū l-Muhājir représente une politique plus souple d'entente avec les autochtones." Cf. p. 16.

²⁰ Khalīfa b. Khayyāt, *Ta'rikh* 139 (AH 59).

²¹ Abū'l 'Arab, *Ṭabaqāt* 71.

²² Troussset 1985, 2002. N. Duval 2002, quoted in "Discussions," *AT* 10: 42, who disagrees with J. Desanges' opinion in favor of Milev, p. 41.

²³ One might wonder whether Khalīfa b. Khayyāt could be referring to one single site which is the well-known 'Ayn M'lilla forty kilometers south of Constantine on the main road between Constantine and Biskra. It is a strategic site on vital communications. It is located at the extreme north of relatively level territory just before terrain becomes more elevated in the approach to Constantine, the provincial capital. A few Roman remains were discovered there early in the French colonial era, together with vestiges of a Roman road. Most remains were quarried and lost. The site is exposed on a plain and would have been vulnerable to raids, unlike the many heavily fortified sites in the hills and mountains to the north. Maybe later sources misunderstood the narrative and thought there were two sites instead of one and the word order became confused. But it is not cited in Late Antiquity and so elicits skepticism. Berthier 1942: 40.

Abū al-Maḥāsin, which already aroused the skepticism of Henri Fournel in 1875.²⁴ Local histories of Mila assume that Abū'l Muhājir captured it.²⁵ Maybe Abū'l Muhājir was raiding for general purposes, but perhaps with covert Byzantine approval or authorization to relieve or protect some Byzantine towns and countryside in Numidia against problems from unauthorized Eurasian tribal raiders. The locale remains a mystery.²⁶ No other details exist. But the identification is far from certain.²⁷ Abū'l Muhājir accomplished this successful operation in Numidia, but no information exists about its larger context or sequel or whether he raided other locations as well. Presumably his removal as commander of Muslims in Africa followed soon thereafter, which made this raid lack immediate consequences. However, he had penetrated far into Numidia, indeed dangerously close to Constantine, whether the controversial Mila lies to the north or south. He had begun the Muslim military penetration of Numidia.

No specific Byzantine military or civilian presence in lower or central Numidia receives mention in the extant sources after the beginning of the 640s (which has epigraphic testimony to the dux of Tigisis) (see Map 8). The inhabitants and combatants were autochthonous populations, it appears. So it is possible that the Byzantine authorities had effectively conceded to Abū'l Muhājir the liberty to act in areas outside of their control against seemingly unruly autochthonous tribes. The precise scope and status of territories with which Abū'l Muhājir arranged peace terms are uncertain. 'Uqba's fame has eclipsed the important actions of Abū'l Muhājir, who probably deserves more credit for the ultimate Muslim victory in Numidia.

'UQBA B. NĀFI'S REPLACEMENT OF ABŪ'L MUHĀJIR
AND HIS EXPEDITION OF 682/3

'Uqba b. Nāfi's activities and operation in 682/3 must be understood in the light of the previous penetration into lower and central Numidia by Abū'l Muhājir and his negotiations with local tribes and with Kasīla himself. But the 682/3 raid by 'Uqba underscores how fragile were the military and diplomatic achievements of Abū'l Muhājir in North Africa.

²⁴ For details, Fournel 1875–81: I: 164; followed by Cambuzat 1986: I: 48, II: 167.

²⁵ Filālī 1998: 12–13.

²⁶ Benabbès 2004: 312–14, 393–4, for various explanations of the reference in Khalifa b. Khayyāt, *Ta'rikh* 139 (AH 59).

²⁷ Benabbès 2005: 467–9.



Map 8 Aurea region of Numidia
 Scale c. 1 : 1,800,000

But little time remained before still more decisive Muslim blows fell in the form of the devastating but fateful raid or expedition in 683 by 'Uqba b. Nāfi'. Many issues surround its interpretation. First of all topographical challenges require re-evaluation. Manuscripts concerning the expedition of 'Uqba b. Nāfi' require more investigation. It is easy to confuse scripts and then misidentify place names in Arabic manuscripts concerning the Early Islamic conquests. Caution is required. Narrators refer to Adna, which is M'sila, or to Zabi Justiniana or to Lambaesis or Lamasba or Belezma or Tilimsān (Tlemcen) or some other unidentified place. Early attributions in the nineteenth century require review. With respect to the highly publicized campaign of the Muslim commander 'Uqba b. Nāfi' in 683, there is confusion about his route westward against the Byzantines after his departure from the Muslim base at al-Qayrawān. This was a raid in force. He passed by the Byzantine control point of Meskiana,²⁸ and then Baghai, in Numidia, in eastern Algeria, which had been constructed to watch and control the movement of autochthonous tribes north of the Aures in southeastern Numidia. Most scholars have assumed that 'Uqba then passed through Lambaesis, the former base of the renowned but dissolved Roman Third Legion, although recently there have been arguments that the Arabic place name Lamis refers to another Roman town, whether Lamasba or Belezma.²⁹ Adna was not Diana Veteranorum (modern Zana, northwest of Batna), which the fifth-century CE Late Roman map the Peutinger Table calls Ad Dianam.³⁰ Adna in fact was Zabi Justiniana, that is, a site at the village of Bechilga (or Bechligha) which lies about four to seven kilometers east of modern M'sila, Algeria in the Hodna.³¹ The late compiler al-Raḡiq al-Qayrawānī states that 'Uqba b. Nāfi' learned that al-Adna or al-Athna was a great city and the residence of many kings, meaning perhaps chieftains.³² Despois, the distinguished geographer of the Hodna, was unsure of Adna's location and thought it was near M'sila.³³ The term *malik* can mean king but it can merely be a vague word for powerful chieftain or lord, not a technical king, whatever that might be

²⁸ Al-Raḡiq al-Qayrawānī, Ibrāhīm b. al-Qāsim, *Tārīkh Ifriqiya wa-al-Maghrib* ed. Al-Munji al-Ka'bi (Tunis: 1968), 42. As usual, highly derivative is the late narrative summary by al-Nuwayri, *Nihāya* xxiv: 26–7.

²⁹ For Lamasba: Y. Duval 1995: 131–68, believes there is no evidence for the survival of Lambaesis as a town in the late seventh century. Followed by Benabbès 2005: 474–8.

³⁰ *Tabula Peuteringiana*, see Bibliotheca Augustana online version, Segmentum III for Ad Dianam. I have abandoned my earlier hypothesis that Adna might be Ad Dianam.

³¹ Identification convincingly made by Cambuzat 1970: 110–13; Cambuzat 1986: I 50–1, II 21–4. Argument accepted by Laporte 2002: 166, n. 145. cf. Benabbès 2005: 478–80.

³² Al-Raḡiq, *Tārīkh* (Al-Munji al-Ka'bi) 42. Ibn Khaldūn, *Tārīkh* iv: 222.

³³ Despois 1953: p. 108, also fig. 14, opposite p. 108.

in North Africa. Procopius of Caesarea used the geographical term *Zāb* (country of Zab, *Zaben te ten chorān*) in a very broad sense for a region, to cover land that stretched beyond or above the Aures in what had been the province of Mauretania Sitifensis, which included many prominent Roman archaeological sites.³⁴ Caution is necessary in evaluating such sources and their terminology for offices. It is easy to overemphasize and exaggerate the probability of the likelihood of identity of classical with Arabic place names. Ibn Nājī also states that Adna was an objective that 'Uqba captured.³⁵ Zabi had been the westernmost major fortified military stronghold of the Byzantines in North Africa since the Byzantine reconquest under Justinian. Its current ruins are barely visible. It is plausible that the expedition of 'Uqba reached Zabi.

Portions of the Aurasian tribe of Banū 'Abd al-Wād, according to later traditions reported by Ibn Khaldūn, participated in 'Uqba's expedition to the west in 683, but were allowed, with his blessing and consent, to return home before the end of the expedition of 683.³⁶

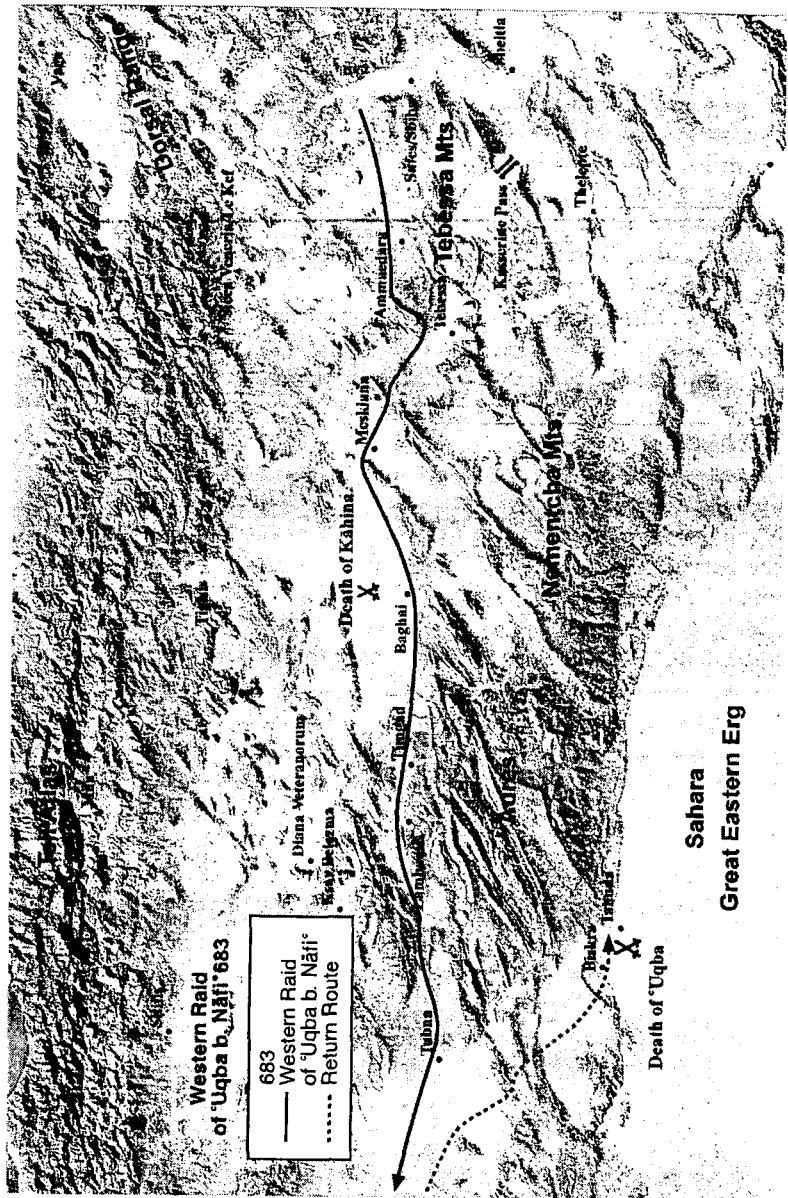
If the route of 'Uqba in 682/3 really passed through Mejana (near Meskiana), Baghai, Lambaesis (or Lamasba, or Belezma or Mammās/Mamis, possibly where Kasila died in battle against Zuhayr b. Qays in 688),³⁷ and then Zabi Justiniana, before Tahert (Tiarret), then 'Uqba's was a coherent or at least bold east-west campaign on his part to reduce or gut major Late Roman or Byzantine strongholds and military forces in Byzantine Numidia prior to the Muslim expeditions that finally eliminated Byzantine coastal strong points in eastern North Africa (Africa Proconsularis, in particular) (see Map 9). He presumably entered Numidia via Ammaedera (Haidra) and/or the Kasserine-Tebessa Gap, although details are lacking. There are other possible traversable routes across the low hills. After his initial frustrations at Baghai, he avoided becoming tied down in lengthy and difficult sieges of well fortified towns and citadels.³⁸ He preferred to sweep through more open country, where his raiding would have accomplished greater psychological and financial and political impact for the efforts that he and his men expended. This was the kind of countryside in which he and his men knew how to wage war effectively.

³⁴ Procopius, *Wars* 3.20.30. Despois, sv. "Hudna," *EP* 4 (1966) 566-7. Older is Yver, sv. "Zab," *EI* 1st French edn., 4.1, pp. 1246-7.

³⁵ Ibn Nājī, *Ma'ālim* 1: 49.

³⁶ Ibn Khaldūn, *Ta'rikh* vii: 71. This tradition may contain a genuine core, that some of the tribesmen accompanied 'Uqba part of the way, but other elements may simply be a later glorification of the tribe.

³⁷ Ibn Abi Dīnār, *al-Mu'nis* 45. ³⁸ Khelifa 2006: 214.



Map 9 Numidian sites of probable initial route and final return of Uqba b. Nafi' (683) and probable site of death of Kahina (698-703?)
 Scale c. 1 : 2,500,000

He avoided the irregular Mediterranean coast, which contained rough terrain and very vulnerable routes that were exposed to blockages, ambushes, and naval interdiction. These localities had hitherto received little or no attention from earlier Muslim raiders.

The fate of other famous Roman sites in modern Algeria, that is in the provinces of Sitifensis and Mauretania Caesariensis, such as Cuicul,³⁹ Caesarea (Cherchell), Setif and Tipasa (Caesariensis), remains unknown and unrecorded by sources in any language. The archaeological evidence for events in them in the late seventh century is likewise inconclusive. It appears that Setif had a Christian community that survived the Muslim conquest, but no narrative or precise epigraphic record exists for its conquest or subsequent fate. The Byzantine fortress at Setif is situated on rather level ground in prosperous plains. Its high walls could not have protected its garrison and refugees indefinitely. It is potentially much more vulnerable than Constantine to besiegers. It controls a fertile plain and intersections of strategic and commercially valuable routes.

One must modify the critique made by the very erudite and distinguished Arabist and Orientalist M. J. de Goeje long ago, in the middle of the nineteenth century. He convincingly rejected the identification of al-Adna with Diana Veteranorum but explained that by mentioning Adna the Muslim geographer Yáqūbī actually referred to the Moroccan region of Sūs al-Adnā.⁴⁰ 'Uqba appears to have used the Kasserine–Tebessa Gap or the region, which is the reason why the first site mentioned, according to al-Raḡīq al-Qayrawānī, is Meskiana. De Goeje's arguments deserve serious consideration,⁴¹ but he ignored the sequence of references to Roman towns: Mejana (slightly northwest of Tebessa, before Meskiana),⁴² Baghai, Lmsn (which may refer to Lambaesis or to Lamasba or even Mamma/Mamis, where Kasila died in battle against Zuhayr b. Qays), Adna and then the Zab region, then Tahert, Tangier, then Sūs al-Adnā, then Sūs al-Aqṣā. However, de Goeje did not have access to the texts of al-Raḡīq al-Qayrawānī or Ibn Nāǧī, which were not then edited. He likewise did

³⁹ According to Professor Amara Allaoua of Amir Abd al Kader Islamic University (Constantine), there is a local Algerian tradition that attributes the capture of Cuicul (Djamila) to Abū'l Muhājir. It is difficult to evaluate this tradition in a critical fashion.

⁴⁰ De Goeje 1860.

⁴¹ Gsell 1911: No. 27, Batna, No. 62, Zana p. 4. Gsell notes and appears to accept, albeit cautiously, the criticisms of de Goeje and therefore doubted the identification of Zana and Ad Dianam or Diana Veteranorum but did not consider Zabi itself as Adna.

⁴² Al-Raḡīq al-Qayrawānī, Ibrāhīm b. al-Qāsim, *Tārīkh Ifrīqiya wa-al-Maghrib*, ed. I. U. Mūsā and A.A. al-Zaydān (Beirut: 1990) 10. Al-Nuwayrī, *Nihāya* xxiv: 26–9. Ibn Khaldūn, *Ta'rikh* IV: 222–3.

not have access to modern scholarship that argues for the credibility of some traditions preserved in these later texts.⁴³ There is another problem with Moroccan *Sūs al-Adnā*. The Muslim narratives report that Adna had many Romans or *Rūm*. That would not fit the region of the *Sūs al-Adnā*. Although Byzantines had penetrated further west in the sixth century after the reconquest, perhaps as far as Zabi (M'sila today in Algeria), it is unclear whether they had any soldiers or garrisons there at any point in the seventh century. But the geographer al-Bakrī mentions al-Adna with a *Wādī Shahr* two "stages" (precise definition of a stage is disputed) west of Tubna.⁴⁴ This underscores the need for more reflection. Some Byzantine troops were stationed at Tubna, and in the southeast at what are now the Tunisian towns of Tozeur (Qastiliya) and Nafta. The identification of Zabi with Adna indicates that 'Uqba penetrated west into outer western limits of the modified Byzantine province of Numidia that had absorbed part of the former province of Sitifensis.⁴⁵ Of course some skeptics may wholly reject early Muslim traditions as unreliable and unacceptable and simply too late to justify credibility. In sum, it is hard to believe that 'Uqba penetrated as far as the *Sūs al-Aqṣā* in Morocco.⁴⁶ He may not have probed further west than Zabi or its vicinity, and it may have been from the Zabi region that he attempted to devise a return to his base in the east. But the 683 raid is impressive in its depth even if he never drew closer to the Atlantic coast.

One modern critic, Laroui, believes that 'Uqba possibly wanted erroneously to bypass the cities of the north, to conquer the middle Maghrib, believing that the enterprise would be easy.⁴⁷ I would restate Laroui's argument to hypothesize instead that 'Uqba intended his campaign to confront and break the back of Byzantine and local Romanized and autochthonous resistance in the core reserve (reserves of manpower and material resources) areas of Byzantine North Africa in Numidia. But sources are inadequate to solve this debate. It is impossible to know what was in 'Uqba's head.

Although there are Muslim traditions about the spread of Muslim conquests from Qayrawān, inhabitants of the North African interior, in what is today's Algeria, have no account in existence in any language about the conquest of their regions by Muslims in the seventh century. So there is

⁴³ Most notably that of H. R. Idris. See citations in bibliography.

⁴⁴ Al-Bakrī, *al-Masālik* 11: 831, sect. 1386. ⁴⁵ Y. Duval 1970: 157-61

⁴⁶ It is simply too far for 'Uqba to have reached the *Sūs al-Aqṣā* having started out from Qayrawān. I agree with the skepticism of Benabbès 2004: 325-31; Benabbès 2005: 480-3.

⁴⁷ Laroui 1970: 78.

no narrative record from inhabitants of Constantine or Baghai or Tiddis or Theveste or Sicca Veneria (Le Kef) or Timgad or Lambaesis (if it still existed) or Sitif or Diana Veteranorum (Zana) or Cuicul (Djamila) or Tipasa or Hippo Regius (Annaba) or Thagaste (Souq Ahras). The surviving record instead involves the retrospective heritage, claims, and interests of Muslim leaders of Qayrawān and their descendants.

'Uqba's circuit of raiding avoided the numerous well-defended northern Numidian strongholds in the vicinity of Constantine, which would have required commitment and expenditure of Muslims' time, engineering expertise, extensive funds, and casualties. Instead he preferred to wage a campaign of maneuver that inflicted psychological as well as physical shock on his foes.

The late text of Ibn Nāji with respect to the expedition of 'Uqba b. Nāfi' to Adina/Adna also uses the archaic measure of distance of miles (the armed clash reportedly took place at a wādī about three miles from Adina), which may indicate that an old source lies behind it.⁴⁸ The texts of 'Uqba's expedition deserve thorough re-examination. Diehl and Caudel neglected that attribution. It was there at Adna (Zabi Justiniana, M'sila) and in other parts of this campaign that 'Uqba crushed the last strength of the Romans (Byzantines) in the region of the Zāb, according to the source of Ibn Nāji.⁴⁹ The Arabic texts specify that it was a city (*madīna*), not a region or country. De Goeje did not have an edition of text of 'Uqba's route that mentioned both Adna and Sūs al-Adnā in separate sections, which suggests that the author or his source intended to refer to two different and distinct place names. De Goeje's old Latin commentary is difficult to procure and difficult for many modern Arabists to understand because of the decline of Latin literacy in the twentieth and twenty-first century. His argumentation requires review and reflection after the passage of more than a century. The identification of the elusive place name of Lamis, which lay not so far from Constantine (about two stages away) according to Ibn Abī Dīnār,⁵⁰ contributes to understanding 'Uqba's route and to understanding the sources of Byzantine strength in terms of fortresses and manpower in Numidia and Sitifensis. Tilimsān may be eliminated as a city on the itinerary of 'Uqba, for it appears out of order and makes no sense. The name probably entered traditions later when memory of earlier obsolete place names had eroded. Palaeographically it is easy to understand how the scribe might have deleted the "b" and its diacritical

⁴⁸ Ibn Nāji, *Ma'ālim* 1: 49. ⁴⁹ Ibn Nāji, *Ma'ālim* 1: 49. ⁵⁰ Ibn Abī Dīnār, *al-Mu'nis* 42.

point that preceded it. That would drop the "b" from Lambaesis in the narrative of the itinerary of 'Uqba, but it is necessary to study this issue still more fully. From Adna/Zabi Justiniana 'Uqba moved some distance westward against the town of Tiaret/Tahert or possibly the Roman site of Columnata.⁵¹ There is a gap in the narrative of Ibn Abi Dīnār if we compare it on the itinerary of the campaign of 'Uqba to those narratives of Ibn Nāǧī and al-Mālikī's *Riyāḍ al-nufūs*. However the historian Ibn Abi Dīnār is very late. One needs to consult Late Roman toponymics in addition to Arabic and earlier Roman or Classical Latin toponymics in order to understand the toponymics at the time of the Muslim conquests. It is not a simple issue. But one must not insist on finding Classical Roman imperial place names beneath Arabic ones.

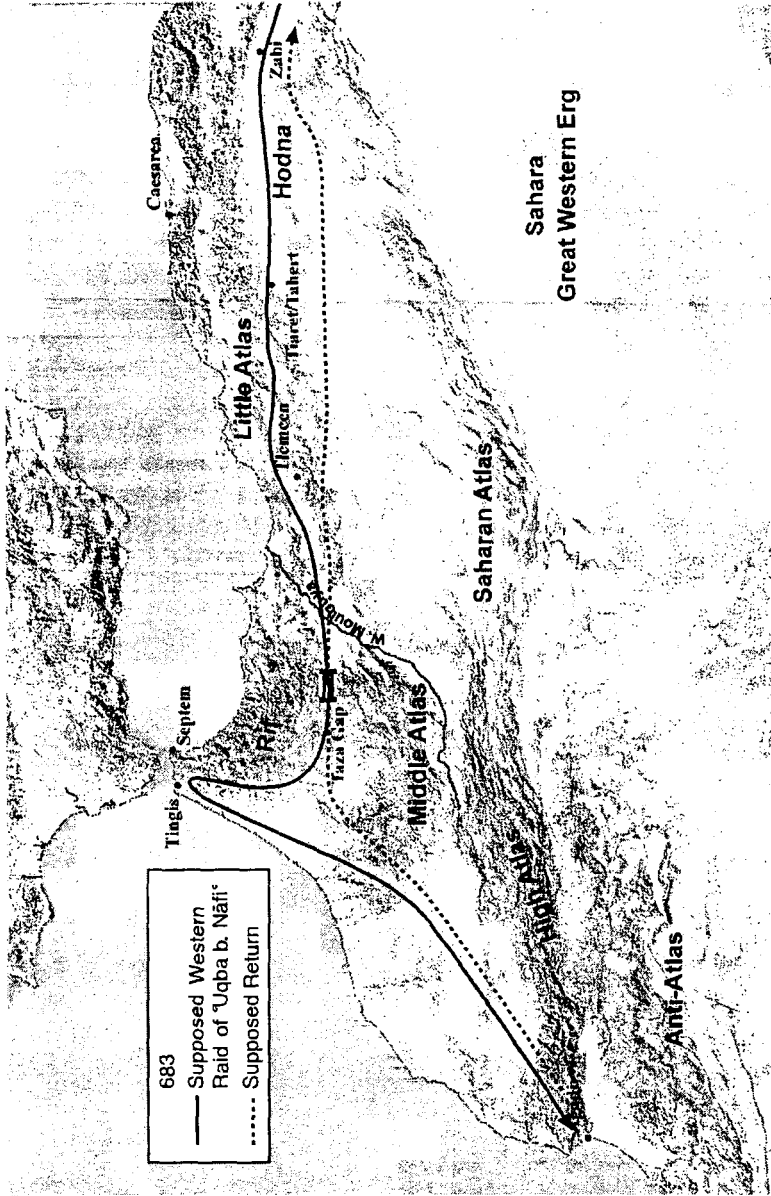
After 'Uqba crushed the Byzantines (who were probably conflated with Romano-Africans in the Muslim historical traditions) at Zabi Justiniana, they reportedly avoided further open battle and withdrew to their fortresses. The strength of the Byzantines faded, as the Muslim traditions mention, after 'Uqba's victory at Adna/Zabi Justiniana.⁵² That was a logical reaction, but it conceded the countryside to the Muslims with serious consequences for livestock, agriculture, housing, and travel.

SIGNIFICANCE OF RESISTANCE TO 'UQBA B. NĀFI'

A study of the place names indicates how important the province of Numidia still was in the seventh century, significant for pools of manpower and strongpoints for backup defenses of Byzantine North Africa (see Map 10).⁵³ It contributes to illuminating the routes of 'Uqba's raiders. There was even some Byzantine presence or ability to raise troops and have access to strongholds in its western section in what had once been the province of Mauretania Sitifensis. Of course many questions remain, and they may remain unsolved. Elucidation of the place names not only helps to illuminate the actual campaigning of 'Uqba in 683 but also helps to explain the potential sources of Byzantine manpower and material resources that lay away from coastal regions. Whatever its problems, Byzantine North Africa had deeper material and human resources than has previously been realized. The Byzantines established a military presence farther west and south in Algeria than scholars have hitherto

⁵¹ Al-Mālikī, *Riyāḍ* I 36-7, for Adna, I: 37 for Tiaret. ⁵² Al-Mālikī, *Riyāḍ* 37.

⁵³ On Numidia's earlier history for the Roman Army in Africa: Fentress 1979.



Map 10 Northwest North Africa, with supposed route of 'Uqba b. Nafi'

Scale c. 1 : 800,000

assumed,⁵⁴ and additional Byzantine strongholds remained, far from the coasts. Hence the Muslim invaders faced a bigger challenge. That is part of the explanation for the considerable time that it took for them to conquer North Africa.

Al-Māliki's tradition of 'Uqba identifies his return from the west into Byzantine Africa at Tubna,⁵⁵ which was in fact at the old frontier of the Byzantine province of Numidia with Mauretania Caesariensis or Sitifensis. Epigraphy confirms the presence of some kind of a Byzantine military and ecclesiastical structure and presence in Numidia between 630 and 650. Earlier, in the sixth century, Byzantines had striven to occupy positions as far as the Hodna and even south of the Aures, but their precise locations in the middle of the seventh century are indeterminate because of the absence of contemporary documentation.

It is possible that 'Uqba deliberately avoided any attempt to attack or capture Tubna because of the strength of its garrison during the initial stages of his expedition westward. Tubna once had been the seat of the powerful Count of Africa, but that office was obsolete and had disappeared by the middle and late seventh century. 'Uqba's failure to eliminate that Byzantine stronghold gave the Byzantines and their autochthonous allies the opportunity to destroy his forces, which they did, when he attempted to return to his base in Muslim-controlled areas in the vicinity of Qayrawān via the region of Tubna.⁵⁶ The size of the Byzantine garrison and local forces at the strategic strongpoint of Tubna is unknown, but the actual Byzantine fortress has modest dimensions and is located on a modest elevation over the surrounding plain. It had become a base for Kasila and his tribesmen by the beginning of the 680s. They controlled it with the tacit consent or acquiescence of more remote Byzantine officials.⁵⁷

Numidia remained a threat to the Muslims during the initial decades of warfare. That is why 'Uqba made this major raid in 683, the one in which he lost his life. He understood that Numidia contributed significant territorial depth to seventh-century Byzantine positions in Africa. That is a strategic reason for his deep penetrating raid from Qayrawān across North

⁵⁴ Troussel 2002; Laporte 2002. For older view that the Byzantines did not establish garrisons much west of Setif, except for their westernmost one at Justiniana Zabi (near M'sila), Despois 1953: 107.

⁵⁵ Ibn Nāji, *Ma'alim* 1: 51; al-Nuwayrī, *Nihāya* xxiv: 29.

⁵⁶ Khelifa Abderrahmane, conversations at *Africa Romana* 16: 2004 in Rabat, December 17, 2004, and at the Hotel Aurassi, Algiers, February 7, 2005.

⁵⁷ Camps 1983: 322–3 sees Kasila as the last king of Mauretania, reminiscent of those who constructed tombs near Frenda and regnal inscriptions.

Africa, from Baghai westward to Lamis (Lamasba possibly),⁵⁸ then Zabi Justiniana and Tahert (Tiaret), then onward west and southwest, whether or not he eventually reached Tangier or the regions of Sūs al-Adnā and of Sūs al-Aqṣā. Skepticism abounds among modern scholars concerning whether ‘Uqba’s expedition ever really penetrated west to Tangier (Tanja) and points south.⁵⁹

The Byzantines needed to find the optimal way to maximize their resistance to the Muslims in Numidia. Numidia possessed inherent natural geographic advantages for defense: mountains, difficult roads, potentially difficult winter weather, and a hardy population. But after the appearance of General Peter in the early 630s, sources do not mention Byzantine military personalities, except possibly (if one accepts a seventh-century date for a lead seal) the *magister militum* Theoktistos, or their capabilities or feats in Numidia. Instead it is autochthonous leaders such as Kaṣīla, Kāhina and her son who receive citation for operations of resistance in Numidia.⁶⁰ Although “Rūm” (a very loose and ambiguous term) joined with autochthonous populations and their leaders in fighting the Muslims, it is unclear whether or to what extent those forces coordinated their resistance with any Byzantine commanders in Carthage or on the Byzantine-controlled islands of Sicily or Sardinia or the Balearics. Probably Kāhina commanded no Byzantine forces. The Arabic text of the ninth-century chronicler al-Balādhurī, *Futūḥ al-buldān* designates Kāhina as “queen of the Berbers,” while Elias of Nisibis calls her “queen of the Rūm,” even though the Syriac version of the same text identifies her as queen of the Berbers.⁶¹ The precise significance of this difference in phrasing is uncertain.

Surviving traditions in Arabic leave the impression that any Roman or Byzantine resistance in Numidia against the Muslims was locally generated and directed, fragmented, and lacked any meaningful coordination with imperial Byzantine commanders and troops on the coast or the islands.⁶² For the modern Maghribi historian Abdullah Laroui, the failure of the Byzantines and especially Roman landholders and leaders was

⁵⁸ Ibn Abi Dīnār, *al-Mu’nis* 44–5.

⁵⁹ *Akbbār majmū’ a fi fath al-Andalus* 14. Chalmeta Gendró 2003: 87–90.

⁶⁰ On Kāhina, al-Balādhurī, *Futūḥ* 229. Another early citation in a literary historical source is in the chronicle of Elias of Nisibis, who drew on lost history of al-Wāqidī, *La Chronographie de Mar Étie Bar Šinaya*, 97. Original text in Syriac and Arabic: Elias of Nisibis, *Chron.*, 156. I thank Fred Donner for advice. Late is Ibn Khaldūn, *Ta’rikh* IV: 224, who identifies her as the greatest of the rulers of the Berbers [al-barbar]. Best is Modéran 2006 and Modéran, sv. “Kahena,” *EB* 4102–11.

⁶¹ Elias of Nisibis, *Chron.*, 156.

⁶² Ibn Khaldūn, *Ta’rikh* VII: 10–11. He does not explain.

simple: it involved an unwillingness to concede leadership to autochthonous chiefs. Perhaps locally generated autochthonous leadership resulted in more effective and more prolonged resistance to Muslims than otherwise would have been the case. But there is no evidence that Byzantine commanders had seriously thought out how to defend Numidia and how to use its resources best to resist the Muslims. There are no reports of the landing of Byzantine commanders or soldiers along the coast of Numidia or conferences between Byzantine commanders from the islands and leaders in Numidia. How well Constans II and his advisers understood the situation in Numidia, for example, is a mystery.

The Muslims' military situation in North Africa, in particular in the provinces of Byzacena and Zeugitana (Africa Proconsularis), remained potentially precarious until Byzantine Numidia and the rich plains of Byzantine Sitifensis were conquered or neutralized. From there, with cooperation from selected autochthonous groupings and leaders, Byzantines could menace Muslim communications and possibly cut off or wipe out Muslim raiders and invaders. It was the Byzantines (whether local descendants of Romans, more recent Byzantine settlers, or those who were intermarried with locals) of Numidia and Sitifensis who reportedly encouraged the autochthonous leaders, such as Kasila and Kāhina, to attack and entrap 'Uqba and other Muslims.

The center of autochthonous tribal resistance in the 680 and 690s to the Muslims in Numidia lay in the south, not in the vicinity of Constantine and not in the north in what would later receive the designations of the Grande or Petite Kabylie. Tubna (Tobna) or the Aures was the base for the chieftain Kasila, while the prophetess and leader Kāhina reportedly also had her original center in the Aures Mountains, from which she moved to the nearby low (and now serpent-infested) elevation that constituted Baghai.⁶¹ Both raided into what had been the provinces of Byzacena and Zeugitana/Africa Proconsularis, but their original bases were located further to the interior and to the south. Byzantines and other local Christians, perhaps of descent from Romans, encouraged the respective resistance of these tribal leaders who had their own interests and resources. It would have been difficult for Byzantines in the Byzantine-controlled islands of the Mediterranean or on ships to maintain very reliable communications with autochthonous leaders far in the interior of Numidia, especially with

⁶¹ Misidentification of coastal "Bijaya" or Bajaia (French Bougie) with Baghai: Abun-Nasr 1987: 31. One needs to know ancient and Byzantine topography in order to understand the history accurately. Importance of Eurasian region for tribal resistance: Ibn Khaldūn, *Ta'rikh* vii: 10-11. Khalifa b. Khayyā, *Ta'rikh* 175.

any in the vicinity of Tubna or Baghai or the Aures Mountains. Such leaders and their tribal groupings may have waged effective resistance but without much dependable contact with Byzantine forces in the Byzantine-controlled islands of the Mediterranean.

The campaign of 'Uqba in 683 was more than a mere heroic, dashing, vain or religious act that has gripped memories. It was risky but had sense and calculation behind it. The apparent intent was to deliver a decisive blow to the innards and backup reserves of Byzantine Africa. It is however impossible to prove this definitively in the absence of documentary evidence; this is a judgment, a reflection, and no more. The increasing appreciation of the extent of Byzantine penetration and occupation of Numidia and even sections of Mauretania Sitifensis reinforces understanding of the potential resources that were available to the Byzantines. It makes even more noteworthy the Muslim achievement in overcoming this Byzantine advantage.

One additional problem in narratives of 'Uqba's campaign is the reported mutual hostility between him and another competing Muslim leader, Abū'l Muhājir. 'Uqba's arrest and captivity of Abū'l Muhājir and the latter's death at the hands of Kasīla while still also a captive of 'Uqba are part of the Qayrawānī tradition. This is especially true for narratives whose chain of authority includes Abū'l Arab. This important tradent was a great grandson of Abū'l Muhājir, who may well transmit traditions that reflect and burnish the fame of his own family and its perspective on events. It is difficult to discount potential tendentiousness in the traditions. Abū'l Muhājir's family handed down their version of the record of the respective treatment and mistreatment of Abū'l Muhājir and 'Uqba b. Nāfi' during the periods when each held command, including the final moments of the life of both. It is difficult to know how accurate narratives of the deaths of both men could have been transmitted because of the annihilation of the Muslims near Biskra (Map 9). To judge from later traditions, 'Uqba preferred a much more forceful and uncompromising approach to autochthonous tribes, in contrast to Abū'l Muhājir's more supple resort to flexibility, compromise, and diplomacy in shaping Muslim policy. But details and trustworthy documentation are lacking.

CONTESTED MEMORIES OF TRIBAL LEADER KASĪLA

Traditions favorable to Abū'l Muhājir stress his mistreatment at the hands of 'Uqba b. Nāfi' while Kasīla and his Byzantines and autochthonous

warriors closed in on both of them at Tahuda.⁶⁴ Kasila commanded both Byzantines and autochthonous forces.⁶⁵ The traditions favorable to Abū'l Muhājir also stress that Abū'l Muhājir had succeeded in conciliating and pacifying Kasila⁶⁶ and inducing him to convert to Islam, until provocative actions and words by 'Uqba and his followers caused an explosion of fury and resulting warfare and the death of many Muslims. 'Uqba reportedly failed to give Kasila adequate respect so he hid his built-up resentments until he learned through the Byzantines of the vulnerability of 'Uqba on his return from his expedition to the west. That tradition favorable to Abū'l Muhājir also seems to put a somewhat negative light even on the subsequent victory of 'Uqba's lieutenant Zuhayr b. Qays over Kasila, even though he caused Kasila to perish at Mammās (Mamis, possibly confused with Lamis)⁶⁷ in 688. Zuhayr b. Qays, it is emphasized, soon had to withdraw to Barqa where a Byzantine expeditionary force destroyed him and his warriors (688–9).⁶⁸ This pro-Abū'l Muhājir tradition also gives prominence to the victory of the successor of Zuhayr, Ḥassān b. Nu'mān al-Ghassānī, who successfully recovered all of North Africa, redeeming the Muslims implicitly from the respective mistakes and carelessness, however well intentioned, of 'Uqba b. Nāfi' and 'Uqba's lieutenant Zuhayr b. Qays. This interpretation requires critical sifting by Islamicists. One may never be able to recover the true course of those events.

The successful tactic that the autochthonous/Byzantine commander Kasila (Kusayla) used against Muslim commander 'Uqba b. Nāfi' in 683 involved patience and calculation. He allowed the deep penetrating Muslim raid to continue, to avoid risky hot pursuit and combat with 'Uqba and the raiders. Instead Kasila and a combined Byzantine and autochthonous force craftily calculated their options and waited for 'Uqba to return and then engaged and annihilated the invaders at a point chosen by the defenders. This may have been a standard tactic against autochthonous raiders. That kind of tactic was just being

⁶⁴ Ibn 'Abd al-Ḥakam, *Fuṣūḥ Miṣr* (Torrey): 198–9. Ibn Nāji, *Ma'alim* 52–3. Ibn Abī Dīnār, *al-Mu'nis* 44. Ibn Khaldūn, *Ta'riḫ* vii: 10–11.

⁶⁵ Modéran, sv. "Koçeila," *EB* 4261–3.

⁶⁶ Al-Mālikī, *Riyād* 33–4, 40; Ibn Nāji, *Ma'alim* 46, 52–3. Ibn al-Athīr, *Kāmil* iii: 386–8, iv: 107; ed. E. Fagnan, "Annales du Magherb et de l'Espagne par Ibn El-Athīr," *Revue Africaine* (1896) 40: 370. al-Nuwayrī, *Nihāya* xxiv: 30.

⁶⁷ Ibn Abī Dīnār, *al-Mu'nis* 45. Mammās is Henchir Douimis northeast of Hadjeb el-Aioun: Solignac 1952: 154–61.

⁶⁸ Thiry 1995: 115.

developed and perfected by Byzantines late in the seventh century. It would become standard.⁶⁹ It is unclear whether Kasila had any information about how that tactic was developing in the east or whether he successfully improvised it on his own initiative in North Africa in 683. But the Romano-African proprietors in the end suffered heavily from autochthonous raids too.⁷⁰

'Uqba b. Nāfi' and 300 of his men perished at Tahūda at the hands of the autochthonous/Byzantine commander Kasila. Some of the survivors reportedly fled east but were captured near Gafsa where the mysterious local lord Ibn Maṣād, who appears to be autochthonous, arranged their release. No other details exist.⁷¹

Kasila seized control of Qayrawān.⁷² Apparently he managed to acquire temporary mastery of much of Byzacena and Numidia and possibly also Zeugitana (Africa Proconsularis) with tacit Byzantine approval. But Kasila's brief occupation of Qayrawān was taken on his own initiative; he was not any Byzantine puppet. According to the *Liber Pontificalis*, by 685 CE "the entire province of Africa was again totally subjugated to the Roman Empire."⁷³ So the contours of the situation appeared to be from the perspective of Rome and Constantinople. This statement can be understood only in the sense of some understanding between Kasila and the Byzantines. Byzantine hopes were raised. But this was a temporary and highly unstable situation that soon changed. The abortive seizure of the region of Byzacena by Kasila violated the old 678 treaty or arrangement between the Byzantines and Muslims and created a pretext for war. How that temporary accommodation between Kasila and the Byzantines actually functioned is uncertain. Documentation is lacking. But after Kasila overran Qayrawān the old agreement of 678 between Byzantines, autochthonous tribes, and Muslims was in shreds. Military and skillful diplomatic actions would resolve problems. Pretexts existed for war.

⁶⁹ Dagron and Mihaescu 1986. Haldon and Kennedy 1980, repr. in: Bonner 2005; "Skirmishing," trans. Dennis, in *Three Byzantine Military Treatises* 1985: 144–239.

⁷⁰ Al-Māliki, *Riyād* 53–4.

⁷¹ Ibn al-Athīr, *Kāmil* IV: 108. Ibn 'Idhārī, *Bayān* 28–9. al-Nuwayrī, *Nihāya* XXIV: 29–31; Ibn Khaldūn, *Ta'rikh* VI: 173, VII: 11. Ibn Khaldūn, *Ta'rikh* IV: 223, does not identify the obscure "lord of Gafsa [sāhib Gafsa]." Benabbès 2004: 373–6; Modéran 2003a: 793–4. Because these traditions about some kind of lord, who apparently was autochthonous, are late, they deserve critical scrutiny. Authentication is difficult.

⁷² Al-Nuwayrī, *Nihāya* XXIV: 32. ⁷³ *Liber Pontificalis* (Duchesne): II: 366.

There is no information about the reactions to or opinions about the Muslim conquest or Byzantine resistance, or lack thereof,⁷⁴ on the part of the inhabitants in the middle and western parts of North Africa. This is a serious gap. After the defeat and death of Kasila at the hands of Zuhayr b. Qays, most probably in 688–9 (less likely in 686 or 687/9) at Mammas (probably Henchir Douimis, which is near but west of Qayrawān),⁷⁵ the strategic fortress city of Sicca Veneria (Le Kef) fell to the Muslims. Equally or more important, according to traditions transmitted by al-Mālikī, Zuhayr b. Qays followed up the annihilation of Kasila by having his forces engage in vigorous pursuit of remnants of Kasila's forces westward as far west as the Wādī Moulouya, the ancient demarcation of the borders of the provinces of Mauretania I and II. The approximate date of these operations was 688–9. The source may engage in rhetorical exaggeration but it claimed "they watered their horses in the Wādī Moulouya, that is, the Wādī Tanja [Tingis, that is the border of the province of Tingis, or Mauretania Tingitana or Mauretania II]." Al-Mālikī's source may well be an old one, for it refers to the Moulouya as some kind of marker. Zuhayr's powerful forces, which numbered 6,000 men (4,000 Arabs, 2,000 Berbers) did not decisively occupy all of that territory west of Sicca Veneria and the provinces of Zeugitana and Byzacena, but the tradition suggests no more effective and coherent resistance remained to the Muslims in the west. The vulnerability of the huge region and its population was laid bare. By engaging in that operation of pursuit Zuhayr's forces gained some familiarity with military and political conditions in the remote west. In principle the opportunity for yet more vast conquests was apparent. This was a great learning experience; the west of North Africa beckoned.⁷⁶ More immediately in Byzacena and Zeugitana (Africa Proconsularis) other significant sites, namely, al Djem (Thysdrus)⁷⁷ and Lorbeus (Laribus), fell to the Muslims.⁷⁸ However in the short term the Muslims experienced some

⁷⁴ van Ginkel 2006.

⁷⁵ Ibn 'Abd al-Hakam, *Futūḥ Miṣr* (Torrey): 200. Al-Mālikī, *Riyād* 45. Al-Nuwayrī, *Nihāya* xxiv: 32–3; Ibn Abī Dīnār, *al-Mu'nis* 45. Ibn Nāǧī, *Ma'ālim* 58. However Khalifa b. Khayyāt, *Ta'riḫ* 175 asserts that it was Mūsā b. Nuṣayr whose forces crushed and forced Kasila to flee from the Tubna region. On the location of Mammas at Henchir Douimis, Tunisia, west of Qayrawān: Solignac 1952: 154–8. See Map 6 on p. 118.

⁷⁶ Al-Mālikī, *Riyād* 47. ⁷⁷ Ibn Abī Dīnār, *al-Mu'nis* 46.

⁷⁸ Al-Nuwayrī, *Nihāya* xxiv: 33; Ibn Abī Dīnār, *al-Mu'nis* 46. Benabbès 2004: 284–6. Somewhat vague is Ibn Nāǧī, *Ma'ālim* 58. al-Tijānī, *Rihlat al-Tijānī* 57–8.

important reverses. Zuhayr returned to the Barqa area (al-Marj, eastern Libya) of Cyrenaica where other Byzantines managed to descend on him with ships and slew him (688–9).⁷⁹ This was a major reverse for the Muslims, even though they had won many victories. Matters seemed to be muddled. But the Byzantines lacked the resources and will to follow through after their and their allies' short-term victories. The situation remained volatile.

⁷⁹ Al-Mālikī, *Riyāḍ* 48. Ibn Abī Dīnār, *al-Mu'nis* 45–6. On the significance of the Barqa region: D. Johnson 1973: 149–52.

CHAPTER II

The fall of Carthage and its aftermath 695–711

The collapse of coordinated local military resistance to Muslims in North Africa accelerated in tandem with the shrinkage of the remaining Byzantine territory. The resourceful Umayyad Caliph 'Abd al-Malik b. Marwān took decisive action to solve problems in North Africa after his final victory (692) in the protracted civil war in the eastern caliphal lands with his rival Ibn al-Zubayr.¹ He brought matters to a climax. He renewed the policy of outfitting raids and campaigns of conquest. He returned to a policy of active struggle against unbelievers and strove to spread the domain of God's kingdom and prepare for the coming last judgment.

'ABD AL-MALIK B. MARWĀN, HASSĀN IBN AL-NU'MĀN, AND THE CAPTURE OF CARTHAGE

'Abd al-Malik b. Marwān sent his very capable commander Ḥassān b. al-Nu'mān in 694 with 6,000 troops from Syria.² It was Ḥassān b. Nu'mān who captured Carthage from the Byzantines in 695/6.³ Ḥassān then shifted his forces to the south to fight the Eurasian autochthonous leader Kāhina in 697. Meanwhile, later in 696, the Byzantine Emperor Leontius, who had recently at Constantinople, in 695, overthrown the last Heraclian dynasty emperor Justinian II, in turn sent a major relief naval expeditionary force under the patrician John to recover Carthage and what remained of North Africa for Byzantium.⁴ The precise numbers of the Byzantine contingents remain unknown. Byzantines under the command of John landed and overran Carthage, and the adjacent strategic district that is

¹ *Akbbār majmū'a fi fath al-Andalus* 14.

² Al-Malīkī, *Riyād* 48. Al-Nuwayrī, *Nihāya* xxiv: 34 (40,000 troops), al-Tijānī, *Rihlat al-Tijānī* 57–8. On 'Abd Al-Malik b. Marwān: Robinson 2005; Hawting 1987.

³ Ibn Nāji, *Mā'ālim* 1: 60.

⁴ Theophanes, *Chron.*, AM 6190 (De Boor: 1: 370; Mango and Scott: 516–17). Zuckerman 2005: 122–3.

now La Goulette as well as several other towns. The Byzantine forces allegedly committed many atrocities as well as plundering much property in the vicinity of Carthage.⁵ This Byzantine reappearance was brief. The Byzantine expeditionary fleet evacuated Carthage in fear of the impending arrival of a massive Muslim naval force that had been raised in reaction to the Byzantine strike. The Byzantines then sailed to Crete, where allegedly out of shame, αἰσχύνη,⁶ and probably out of frustration, for their military failure in North Africa, they rebelled against Emperor Leontius and proceeded to Constantinople. There they overthrew Emperor Leontius and elected one Tiberius Apsimar as emperor.⁷ Ḥassān ibn al-Nu'mān meanwhile besieged and captured Carthage. The Muslims gained from Byzantine internal strife at Constantinople.

A significant but late Muslim narrative about the final days of Byzantine Carthage and Byzantine authority in North Africa, in 697/8 CE, explains one version of the fate of Byzantine remnants when Carthage fell to the Muslims under the commander Ḥassān ibn al-Nu'mān:

When Ḥassān came to Carthage and he slew its cavalry and its soldiers, those who survived in it decided that they should escape. They had many ships. Some of them went to Sicily and some of them went to Spain. When Ḥassān set out, the population from the valley and the regions learned of the departure of the ruler [Exarch], they rushed and entered Carthage. Ḥassān moved against Carthage, encamped at it and besieged it. He made a frightful massacre. He reduced the survivors to captivity and handed the city over to pillage after the inhabitants surrendered to the appeal of his envoys. They hurried to run away, so much had the violence of his attacks and his bravery terrified them. When none of them remained, he had Carthage destroyed and dismantled, so that every trace was effaced.⁸

It was not only the Romans who leveled Carthage long ago, in the second century BCE, but according to this Muslim tradition, also the Muslims who in their turn, 838 years later, leveled Roman or Byzantine Carthage, which was hated by some as the seat of the administration or Exarchate of Byzantine Africa. Such is the description by the Arab historian and geographer Ibn 'Idhārī of the actions of Ḥassān ibn al-Nu'mān, the Muslim conqueror of Roman and Byzantine Carthage, who effected its second and definitive capture in 697/8, and its second major destruction. In modern

⁵ Thoughtful analysis by Benabbès 2004: 295–309.

⁶ Joannes Zonaras, *Epit. Hist.* 14.23.6 = III (Pinder and Büttner-Wobst): 234; Σύνοψις Χρονικῆ, Μεσομωτικῆ Βιβλιοθήκη: VII: 115; al-Tijānī, *Rihlat al-Tijānī* 6–7.

⁷ Σύνοψις Χρονικῆ, Μεσομωτικῆ Βιβλιοθήκη, VII: 115–16. Kaegi 1981a: 188–208.

⁸ Ibn 'Idhārī *Bayān* I: 35. Cf. Ibn Nāǧī, *Ma'ālim* 60–1. Al Mālikī, *Riyād* 56–57. Al-Nuwayrī, *Nihāya* XXIV: 35. Al-Tijānī, *Rihlat al-Tijānī* 6.

times it has become the seat of both the Tunisian Presidential palace and many archaeological excavations. Remnants of Christian resisters and refugees fled to and lingered in the Cape Bon peninsula. These concentrated in rugged terrain around Mornag (Mornaq, namely the plain that lies near the mountain of the same name) or at the port of Clypea (modern Tunisian Kelibia), from which some fled to the island of Pantelleria and beyond.⁹ Others surrendered to terms from Ḥassān ibn al-Nu'mān. Muslims then systematically reduced all of the nearby islands.¹⁰ It was Ḥassān ibn al-Nu'mān who began the serious construction of Tunis to replace Carthage as the principal port and emporium for Muslim North Africa or Ifriqiya.¹¹ Much of the *spolia* went into the construction of Tunis, as is evident from the many re-used blocks and stone columns in old houses and mosques. According to one narrative, this second destruction of Carthage involved terror; it was reportedly thorough and involved cutting the aqueducts, as well as a massacre of the remaining male inhabitants.¹² That report may well reflect literary exaggeration, for some archaeological investigations have pointed to a different outcome, concluding that total destruction at the hands of the Muslims did not take place, that urban life continued at Carthage after the final Muslim conquest and occupation. Perhaps only the Byzantine and North African elites and the garrison of Carthage fled abroad.¹³

THE EMERGENCE OF KĀHINA

As a result of Ḥassān ibn al-Nu'mān's decisive campaigns many Byzantines or Romans fled to Sicily and to Spain (al-Andalus).¹⁴ He besieged others at Beja (Vaga, in far northwest Tunisia) while some autochthonous contingents fled to Būna (at Hippo Regius, Bône, Annaba, on the northeast Algerian coast).¹⁵ He campaigned in the Satfura, the northernmost region

⁹ Al-Tijānī, *Riḥlat al-Tijānī* 10–13. Carile and Cosentino 2004: 24–5.

¹⁰ Al-Tijānī, *Riḥlat al-Tijānī* 13.

¹¹ The foundation of Tunis, despite its importance, is not a topic for narration in this inquiry.

¹² Ibn Abī Dīnār, *al-Mu'nis* 46.

¹³ Benabbès 2004: 288–93. sv. "La fin de Carthage," *EB* 1810–11.

¹⁴ Al-Māliki, *Riyād* 48–9. On the flight of *al-Faranja* (Franks) and *Rūm* (Byzantines), whom he regards as aliens who failed to impose their ways permanently on autochthonous tribes: Ibn Khaldūn, *Ta'rikh* vii: 10.

¹⁵ Al-Māliki, *Riyād* 49. Al-Nuwayrī, *Nihāya* xxiv: 35. Dr. Saïd Dahmani explained to me on June 12, 2005 in a conversation at Annaba (Hippo Regius ruins) that Būna may refer to the low hill that overlooks the ruins of Hippo, that it may designate territory that the museum complex now occupies. Dahmani 2003: 255–68.

of Tunisia near Hippo Diarrhytus (modern Bizerte).¹⁶ He then confronted the emergence of the prophetess Kāhina, who aroused and led a strong, albeit unnumbered, following after 698.¹⁷ He learned of Kāhina and her troops of autochthonous tribesmen, together possibly with some Romano-Africans, who encamped at her stronghold of Baghai in lower Numidia. She may not have commanded any Byzantines and probably had no alliance or coordinated policies with Byzantium. Kāhina may have been some kind of Christian.¹⁸ The tribe of Banū Ifran reportedly constituted part of her support, although designations of other alleged components, such as tribes classified as Zanata and "Botr," are questionable.¹⁹ Ḥassān ibn al-Nu'mān shifted his forces southwards to encounter and overcome that threat. He campaigned three years there. Kāhina initially razed her fortress walls at Baghai and then maneuvered and managed to defeat him near Meskiana in lower Numidia.

Ḥassān ibn al-Nu'mān retreated and regrouped his forces to return from the east via Gabes and Qastiliya (region with fortresses below Gafsa; it is sometimes identified with modern Tozeur). He amassed adequate forces and then returned to campaign in Numidia. He pursued Kāhina and her forces westward and eventually crushed her forces and slew her at Tarfa, about ten kilometers north of Baghai, again in lower Numidia.²⁰ Very old continuities persisted, for this region had been the center of gravity for past Roman imperial efforts to control difficult autochthonous tribes. After the defeat and death of the prophetess and leader Kāhina between 698 and 703,²¹ the way to the west via land was decisively open to the Muslims. From one perspective Ḥassān ibn al-Nu'mān was the real leader who was responsible for the Muslim conquest of North Africa, for he completed the conquest of the critical province of Zeugitana or old Africa Proconsularis.²²

¹⁶ Al-Māliki, *Riyād* 49.

¹⁷ Modéran 2006: 178–9, believes that Kāhina commanded no Roman or Romanized troops. Modéran, sv. "Kahena," *EB* 4102–11. Allegations of Jewish identity are very questionable.

¹⁸ Al-Māliki, *Riyād* 50; al-Nuwayri, *Nibāya* xxiv: 35–7; al-Tijāni, *Rihlat al-Tijāni* 58. Summary account from eleventh century: *Chronographie de Mar Elie bar Sinaya* 97. Original text in Syriac and Arabic: *Eliae Metropolitanæ Nisibeni Opus Chronologicum*, p. 156. Ibn Khaldūn, *Ta'rikh* vii: 10–11. Modéran, sv. "Kahena," *EB* 4102–11.

¹⁹ Ibn Khaldūn, *Ta'rikh* vii: 11.

²⁰ Al-Māliki, *Riyād* 44; Ibn 'Idhārī, *Bayān* I: 37; Ibn Nāji, *Ma'alim* I: 60–5; al-Raqīq, *Tarikh* 31–3. Al-Nuwayri, *Nibāya* xxiv: 37. Less detailed is Ibn Khaldūn, *Ta'rikh* iv: 224. For a reconstruction of events, Benabbès 2004: 375–86; Benabbès 2005: 480–9. Birebent 1962: 248–83. Disputed locale could be north of Tubna or Timgad. See Map 9 on p. 233.

²¹ Ibn 'Abd al-Hakam, *Futūh Miṣr* (Torrey): 201. Al-Māliki, *Riyād* 55–6. According to one tradition Ḥassān defeated and slew Kāhina near Tabarqa, Ibn Abī Dīnār, *al-Mu'nis* 47.

²² Djaīt 2004: 33.

Muslim traditions do report that Christian Africans became outraged and alarmed at later autochthonous physical ravages of the countryside under the alleged orders of Kāhina who belonged to, according to a late tradition, the tribe of Jawara.²³ Because of their frustration they allegedly appealed to Ḥassān ibn al-Nu'mān for assistance and relief from autochthonous depredations. According to that tradition, Christians were compelled by autochthonous raids to make joint cause with, appeal to, and rely on Muslims for protection.²⁴ There is no easy way to confirm these later Muslim traditions. No report of such actions on the part of Christian Africans exists in the previous stages of Muslim campaigning in North Africa, except of course for Christians' acceptance of the obligation to pay a large tribute to prevent more depredations. One speculation posits that Romano-African or Byzantine landowners did not wish to recognize the authority of the rebel forces in the Aures Mountains.²⁵ Available sources indicate that North African landowners sought to protect their own interests at a minimal cost to themselves. There is no reason to doubt that they probably opposed any scorched-earth policy that would seriously damage their own rural properties and crops. Some of them, as well as some other autochthonous tribes, eventually chose to accept subjugation to Muslim commanders. They have not left memoirs or other documents about their views. There were practical problems that complicated efforts to coordinate remaining Roman and Byzantine resistance and interests in Africa *Proconsularis* with autochthonous resistance.

Kāhina's base was in the remote and self-contained Aurasiatic Mountains, although she briefly moved her headquarters to the nearby strategic and well-fortified slightly elevated post of Baghai, somewhat to the north, that already had proven to be a stubborn early obstacle for 'Uqba b. Nāfi' in 683. She had no documented power in the North African northwest, in Mauretania I or II. But detailed narratives are lacking on Muslim penetration: the precise routes, numbers of troops, and combats. Būna (Annaba, Hippo Regius, which included the Late Antique ruins and probably the adjacent hill that now is the approach to and site of the modern archaeological museum of Hippo and its storehouse) fell soon thereafter.²⁶ Muslims probably bypassed major fortified strongholds such as Constantine; their reduction would have required too much time and technical expertise.

²³ The tribal ascription is problematical. The source for her tribal identity and genealogy: Ibn Khaldūn, *Ta'rikh* VII: 10–11.

²⁴ Al-Mālīki, *Riyād* 53–4. Al-Nuwayrī, *Nihāya* XXIV: 37. ²⁵ Laroui 1970: 79.

²⁶ Ibn Nāji, *Ma'ālim* I: 6r. I thank Dr. Saïd Dahmani for topographic advice about Hippo Regius.

Eventually their inhabitants either surrendered or made terms with the Muslims, but no explicit record exists. Already in 688–9 Zuhayr b. Qays' troops had rapidly pushed as far west as the Moulouya, but that operation had not involved permanent garrisoning or occupation. It had however revealed the exposure and vulnerability of the rest of Numidia and the two Mauretaniae to Muslim expeditionary probes.²⁷ No chronicles exist of lengthy sieges or battles in Byzantine Numidia after the dashing raids of Abū'l Muhājir in 679 at Mila (?) and especially that of 'Uqba in the early 680s. Organized Byzantine resistance had collapsed. One cannot trace organized Byzantine military units and their actions after this point.

The challenges for the Muslims remained great. They lacked forces to reduce the formidable fortresses of the mountainous regions around Constantine in Numidia. No information exists about the Muslim occupation of Constantine. Yet it was a prominent fortified stronghold with strong identification, through its name, with the Christian Roman heritage. Constantine may have been too tough to conquer by siege or storm. It was simpler to let it yield after the surrounding Numidian countryside had fallen under the sway of the Muslims. French colonial scholarship that referred to a Muslim tradition about the fall of Constantine deserves skepticism.²⁸ But Byzantines remained close to Constantine as late as 636, as we know from the dated inscription from Teleghma (Telergma), only forty kilometers from Constantine. Muslim traditions may have had nothing noteworthy to report about the fall of Constantine to Muslims. Latin and Greek sources say nothing either. The silence is noteworthy but risky to interpret. The entire Constantinois region contains difficult topography for any conqueror to master without in some fashion winning the support or acquiescence of its leaders and inhabitants. The terrain is defensible. There is fertile countryside worthy of defense. But Constantine did not become an identifiable center of Byzantine and local resistance. Leaders of resistance to Muslims as well as refugees did not concentrate there, as far as is known. But the precise conditions in Byzantine Numidia's administrative center, Constantine, remain obscure. Constantine (Constantina) significantly retained its name after the Muslim conquest and it still preserves it in the twenty-first century. It accordingly retained some kind of Late Antique or Byzantine identity with the founder of the Byzantine Empire. However the explanation for the remarkable survival of the place name Constantine after the Muslim conquest remains unclear. From the perspective of Constantinople it probably did not appear to be feasible to

²⁷ Al-Mālikī, *Riyāḍ* 47.

²⁸ Maitrot de la Motte-Capron 1927.

sustain resistance after the loss of Carthage. It was too difficult to maintain communications. Constantinople did not worry about defending the bastion of Constantine in Numidia and its countryside, even though many impressive fortresses were scattered throughout the Tebessa, Thagaste, and Constantinois areas.

The defenders were local, perhaps mixed with a few remnants of what had been Byzantine contingents. It would have been impractical for Muslims to divert soldiers to garrison the area sector by sector or to besiege and reduce fortresses one by one. It was dangerous to commit troops in hostile mountain passes where provisions could be difficult to procure and where ambushes could occur at any time. That was no region for the kind of mobile warfare in which the Muslims excelled. Any satisfactory outcome required negotiation with autochthonous peoples and their leaders to conciliate them and win them over without heavy casualties or heavy expenditures of funds. No narrative source describes how that process took place. There are no reports of dramatic battles or sieges or storming of fortified cities.

Resistance to the Muslims in remaining regions of North Africa henceforth became local and uncoordinated with larger Byzantine strategy. Defenders enjoyed many inherent topographical advantages but could not turn these to full advantage. Many resources enriched Numidia, but it was difficult to maintain good communications with any other Byzantine opponents of the Muslims.

MŪSĀ B. NUṢAYR PUSHES WESTWARD

Ḥassān b. Nu'mān left Africa later in 697/8 but in 704 was stripped of his booty by 'Abd al-Azīz, governor of Egypt, who was brother of Caliph 'Abd al-Malik. Details are absent for the crucial following years.

Almost two decades after the annihilation of Kasīla's forces 'Abd al-Azīz, who was governor of Egypt, appointed Mūsā b. Nuṣayr²⁹ to assume the leadership of the Muslim armies in North Africa. His forces, whose total numbers are indeterminate, included troops from Egypt, Ifriqiya, as well as other volunteers, but no regular troops from Muslim armies in Syria. In 698–9, according to one tradition, he successfully led Muslim forces against autochthonous tribesmen who had resisted 'Uqba b. Nāfi. Again, fighting centered at first not in the north but in southern Numidia, in the broader Eurasian region. He penetrated Numidia as far

²⁹ On Mūsā: Chalmeta Gendrón 2003: 99–112.

as Tubna, capturing many, reportedly 20,000.³⁰ He profited from the policies of assimilation and cooptation of autochthonous tribes that Ḥassān b. al-Nūmān had already pioneered. He also profited from the earlier deep penetrations west by forces of Zuhayr b. Qays in 688–9. Muslims had collected a lot of intelligence and made some contacts.³¹ Mūsā b. Nuṣayr strove to prevent contact between Christian populations in North Africa and any Byzantine naval forces. He conceived widespread offensive strikes against the remnants of Byzantine military authority on land and sea. He sponsored maritime raids against such Byzantine-controlled islands as Sicily, where he dispatched the successful raider ‘Ayyāsh b. Akhyaḷ, who attacked Syracuse and won much booty.³² In 705/6 Mūsā b. Nuṣayr sent two expeditions against Sardinia, one led by his son ‘Abd Allāh b. Mūsā b. Nuṣayr and the other by ‘Abd Allāh b. Ḥudhayfa al-Azdi. The raiders seized much booty and many prisoners and possibly captured the major port of Cagliari briefly.³³ The fate of Algerian coastal areas such as Caesarea (modern Algerian Cherchel) or Oran is unknown. Records do not exist to track Muslim movement in that region or any reactions of inhabitants. One interpretation of the Hispanic *Chronicle of 754* might suggest that by using circuitous routes by way of Libya or Cyrenaica Muslims, on the command of Caliph Walid, conquered Mauretania: “[Walid] brought cities to utter destitution, besieged fortresses, and, from the twisted paths of Libya, subjugated all of Mauretania.”³⁴ But there is an alternative reading of the Latin text: “[Walid] reduced the cities to empty powerlessness; he besieged the fortresses amidst the byways of Libya; he put all Mauritania under his yoke.” That is, “he incapacitated the major centres (on the highways, if you will), he constrained by siege outposts in the harder-to-reach ‘Libyan’ outback; he reduced all Mauretania to his control.” It is pointless to speculate further on this obscure passage.³⁵

³⁰ Khalifa b. Khayyāt, *Ta’rikh*: 175, 177, claims that Kasila was still leading local forces and was forced to flee at that time. This tradition conflicts with another that reports the slaying of Kasila more than a decade earlier at the hands of Zuhayr b. Qays.

³¹ Al-Māliki, *Riyād* 47.

³² *Chronicle of 754* trans. K. B. Wolf, *Conquerors and Chroniclers*: 149; al-Raḡīq *Tārikh* (Al-Munji al-Ka’bi) 89; Ibn al-Athīr, *Kāmil* IV: 566; al-Nuwayrī, *Nihāya*: XXII Pt. 2: p. 30. According to Khalifa b. Khayyāt, *Ta’rikh* 190–1, Mūsā b. Nuṣayr sent al-Mughīra b. Abī Burda al-‘Abdi, who conquered an unidentified major Sicilian city, in 705 CE (AH 86).

³³ Khalifa b. Khayyāt, *Ta’rikh* 190–1.

³⁴ *Continuationes Isidorianae. Additamenta IV. V: Continuatio Byzantia Arabica a. DCCXXI; V. Continuatio Hispana a. DCCLIV* in *MGH AA II* (Berlin: 14): 352. Translation from Wolf, *Conquerors and Chroniclers* sect., 51 pp. 130–1.

³⁵ My colleague Michael Allen (University of Chicago) prefers a different reading for the obscure Latin text of the *Chronicle of 754* from that of T. Mommsen in *MGH AA II*: “... civitates ad irrita inopia adduxit castella obsessione adflixit in Libie amfractibus omne Mauritania subiugabit.”

Reportedly no one successfully resisted Mūsā although he slew and captured many, for there was combat. The author of the historical compilation *Akhhbār majmū'a fi fath al-Andalus* only speaks of Mūsā's forces fighting "Berbers" and conquering their cities until he reached and captured Tangier (Ṭanjā) in the far west. No details in this extremely brief account exist concerning conditions or political structures that he and his armies encountered.³⁶ There is no reference to Byzantines or Romans or to their warships.³⁷ Probably Mūsā b. Nuṣayr and his warriors utilized the strategic Taza Gap to enter what is now Morocco. Details and documentation are lacking. Mūsā's forces captured reportedly 100,000 persons (overwhelmingly autochthonous people) in North Africa (not necessarily in what is Morocco today) although there were later disputes about how many were sent on to Caliph 'Abd al-Malik.³⁸ Mūsā sent reinforcements of 1,700 soldiers to Ṭāriq b. Ziyād – an autochthonous North African client of Mūsā who was entrusted with command of the first Muslim expeditionary force into Spain. Of these only a very modest contingent – 16 – were Arab troops, so the majority were autochthonous, not Arabs.³⁹

The Romans and Byzantines never devised any elaborate military defenses in the provinces of Mauretania Sitifensis and Caesariensis in order to resist invaders coming from the east. No textbook solutions or plans existed. Nevertheless, local inhabitants of those regions, whether in coastal or interior districts, had adequate advance notice to prepare themselves by fortifying strongpoints, storing up adequate provisions, and mustering local forces. Whether many managed to do so is unclear from the skimpy primary sources.

After the fall of Byzantine Carthage it appears that the Byzantine naval strength, whether or not it was in the process of being developed or reorganized in a major fashion under Constans II, was transferred temporarily

He explains: "That needs punctuation, which to my eye and mind needs to be: ... civitates ad irrita inopia adduxit; castella obsessione adflixit in Libie amfractibus; omne Mauritania subiugabit." Allen continues: "The actual words do not readily bear the punctuation in the edition (Mommson), whereas the words and meaning fall neatly into harmony, rather, by keeping 'in Libie amfractibus' distinct from 'omne Mauretania'. Doing otherwise seems to me forced in this particular context and in the portrayed sequence of events." Libya in this text can have the more restricted meaning of Cyrenaica: K. Zimmermann, sv. "Libye," *EB* 4378–80, 4385.

³⁶ Likewise vague is Ibn Khaldūn, *Tārīkh* vii: 11–12.

³⁷ *Akhhbār majmū'a fi fath al-Andalus* 14–5; Ibn Abi Dīnār, *Al Mu'nīs* 48; al-Nuwayrī, *Nihāya* xxiv: 39–40; Ibn Khaldūn, *Tārīkh* iv: 224. Too late and excessively derivative is the information on the fall of Tangier in al-Maqqarī, *Nafh al-ṭīb* i: 214–15.

³⁸ Ibn 'Abd al-Ḥakam, *Futūḥ Miṣr* (Torrey): 204. The number appears to be exaggerated.

³⁹ Ibn 'Abd al-Ḥakam, *Futūḥ Miṣr* (Torrey): 204.

(for a duration of perhaps five or ten years?) westward to Septem, or Arabic Sebta (modern Ceuta).⁴⁰ The size of that force is unknown. But such a naval force and its manpower could not control Mauretania II Tingitana and the interior of the northern tip of Morocco for Byzantium. The Byzantines lacked the means and lacked a strategy or policy for defending the straits and any remaining territories in the interior of Tingitana. They had never exercised much control or committed many troops in that region. Now it became even more impractical. Their naval group then moved to the naval base of Cagliari, Sardinia at some subsequent unknown date, probably after a short interlude.

Some time in the late seventh century the Mauretanian strategic fortress and port of Septem (Ceuta) became de facto independent from Byzantium or fell under Visigothic influence or outright control and annexation.⁴¹ The Muslim author of the *Akbbār majmū'a fi fath al-Andalus* speaks of Septem and the other towns along the Straits of Gibraltar as subject to the Visigothic king, not to Byzantium, by the time of the arrival of Mūsā.⁴² But this is a late source. The last secure mention of Septem as Byzantine is dated to 641, when it served as a remote place of exile for the important and powerful Byzantine treasurer Philagrius.⁴³ The Byzantines may well have lost control there shortly after 641, during the very vulnerable moments of the initial years of the reign of Constans II. When the Muslim commander Mūsā b. Nuṣayr seized control of Tingis/Tangier early in the eighth century CE, Julian, who apparently held the vague title of Count, controlled Septem.⁴⁴ He also had controlled Tingis (Tangier). But although he may once have held some Byzantine title or rank (which we do not know, no documentation exists) by 711 he seems to have fallen under the control of the Visigoth King Theodoric.⁴⁵ Julian may well have achieved and enjoyed virtual or actual independence from Byzantine authority. Mūsā b. Nuṣayr's client Ṭāriq b. Ziyād was able to use Tingis (Tangier) as a base for crossing to Spain in 710/11.⁴⁶ How much earlier Mūsā b. Nuṣayr managed to gain control of Tingis is unclear.

⁴⁰ Oikonomides 1964. But for arguments that no Byzantine fleet existed until created by Constans II as a reaction to the emergence of a new Arabo-Muslim naval threat: Zuckerman 2005, Condition of fleet somewhat later: Ahrweiler 1966.

⁴¹ Gosalbes Cravioto 1981.

⁴² *Akbbār majmū'a fi fath al-Andalus* 15.

⁴³ Nicephorus, *Short History* c. 30 (Mango): 81.

⁴⁴ *Akbbār majmū'a fi fath al-Andalus* 15–16; Ibn Abi Dīnār, *al-Mu'nis* 49. Also, but late and highly derivative, al-Maqqari, *Nafḥ al-tib* 1: 214–15. Chalmeta Gendró 2003 118–21.

⁴⁵ Villaverde Vega 2001. Vallejo Girvés 1993: 335–42.

⁴⁶ Khalifa b. Khayyāṭ, *Ta'rikh* 193.

If there is any truth to the story of Julian's anger about the injured honor of his daughter, whom King Theodoric allegedly violated, it would be part of a hostage story as well: Theodoric would have held her as a hostage to keep a check on Julian who might be prone to break away (as in fact happened). But the Byzantines were no longer in formal control of any point of Mauretania II Tingitana or Morocco at the arrival of Mūsā b. Nuṣayr. Even in the early fifth century, Tingitana probably had no more than 1,000 to 1,500 combat-worthy Roman troops. Byzantine Tingitana may well have contained far fewer defenders shortly before Byzantine rule vanished.⁴⁷ Mūsā's appointee Ṭāriq b. Ziyād took the initiative. It is a reminder that the issue is not merely the attitudes of Romans, Byzantines, and agricultural and pastoral populations. But the circumstances and objectives and operations of the Muslim conquest of Spain lie outside the limits of this investigation.⁴⁸ Byzantium had withdrawn from the region in favor of a limited redeployment in Sardinia, Sicily, and southern Italy. Byzantines and Visigoths did not coordinate resistance to Muslims in extreme northwest Africa and in extreme southern Spain. If anything, friction continued between Byzantines and Visigothic authorities. That friction diminished any possibility for the maximizing of effective joint military resistance. The failure of the Byzantines and Visigoths to develop any coordinated resistance was yet another reason for Byzantine collapse in North Africa, with still further implications for imminent Muslim success in the Hispanic peninsula.

THE BALEARIC ISLANDS, SPAIN

Muslim raids commenced against what had been the Byzantine-controlled Balearic Islands in 708, and were followed by additional ones. 'Abdallāh son of Mūsā b. Nuṣayr commanded one early Muslim naval expedition against the rich and strategic Balearic islands of Mallorca and Minorca in 708 CE.⁴⁹ He raided, plundered, and captured and carried away inhabitants of the islands. Presumably his raids started from Muslim-controlled ports in what had once been western Mauretania. A permanent Muslim occupation of the Balearics did not take place until 798. No known Greek sources

⁴⁷ Estimate of Late Roman defense forces: Heather 2005: 270.

⁴⁸ Chalmeta Gendrón 2003. Survey: Rucquoi 1993: 68–82. Christys 2003.

⁴⁹ Khalifa b. Khayyāt, *Ta'rikh* 192. English translation of text by Wurtzel "The Umayyads": 233–4: AH 89, "Mūsā b. Nuṣayr sent his son 'Abdalah b. Mūsā on a raiding expedition. He went to Mallorca and Menorca, two islands between Sicily and Spain, and conquered them. This expedition was called the 'Raid of the Nobles,' because among his troops were many nobles."

exist on this problem of the Balearics. Sometime between 698 and 700–2 CE the Byzantines had raided mainland Visigothic Spain, probably the Mediterranean coastal area near Murcia in the reign of King Theudimir. The facts and the Byzantine objective remain obscure. No reliable information exists concerning the numbers of ships or crews or expenses or casualties or commanders. Such naval raids presume Byzantine use of the Balearics (whether or not there was any secure and effective Byzantine occupation and control) and perhaps use of or cooperation with those in control of Septem (Ceuta), but more cannot be said.⁵⁰ The Byzantines had regrouped their military forces and reorganized their remaining bases in the central and western Mediterranean after their loss of the bulk of North Africa. Sardinia became a base for their regrouped control of the remaining islands in the western Mediterranean, which probably included the Balearics.⁵¹

Many questions remain open concerning the organization of the defense of the Balearics and other island holdings. No explicit evidence exists for any assertion that the Byzantines had created any formal military “theme” or themal organization at Septem and in the Balearics, nor is there any information concerning what such a themal organization actually constituted.⁵² Any hypothesized Byzantine themal paradigm cannot easily be superimposed to explain change and institutions and conditions that far west in the Mediterranean. But those unsuccessful Byzantine raids on Visigothic territory in Spain indicate some Byzantine presence or relationship with the Balearics at the end of the seventh and/or the beginning of the eighth century.⁵³ They demonstrated some striking power. They do indicate a surprising continuing Byzantine naval presence and commitment to intervene in the far western Mediterranean even after the loss of all or virtually all of the former Byzantine possessions in North Africa.⁵⁴ They indicate persisting Byzantine interest and military activities in the far western Mediterranean, even in the face of competing very serious Muslim threats elsewhere. The Byzantines were sufficiently strong, as they demonstrated by their raiding of the Spanish coasts, for the Muslims in North Africa to continue to be wary of them and to seek to eliminate or neutralize them in the western Mediterranean.

⁵⁰ Amengual i Batle 2005. ⁵¹ Oikonomides 1964.

⁵² Judicious criticism of the notion and even of an ideology of themal existence in the seventh century: Zuckerman 2005: 25–34.

⁵³ *Cont. Hisp.* 74 = *Chronicle of 741 in MGH AA* II, vol. II: 354. Also Vallejo Girvés 1993: 330–5, 342–7.

⁵⁴ García Moreno 2002: 186–92.

That was a precondition for the consolidation of Muslim authority in that region.

Yet there is a cautionary point: no explicit literary, archaeological, or epigraphic confirmation exists that the Byzantines still controlled the Balearics at this time, even though they probably did. Some kind of Byzantine presence existed in the seventh century and it may have persisted much longer. However, *de facto* local autonomy is conceivable there.³⁹ The Balearics had been under the jurisdiction of the Prefecture of Africa. Muslim objectives probably included efforts to throw Byzantine naval forces off balance, to deter them from intervening along the North African coast, and in general to dismantle or neutralize Byzantine naval power in the western Mediterranean. Such operations contributed to the consolidation of Muslim control over the North African coastline that lay west of Carthage. They impeded any potential Byzantine effort to project naval power from the islands that remained under imperial control in the far western Mediterranean. They forced inhabitants on the Balearics to worry about their own security. They contributed to the unraveling of Byzantine power in the far western Mediterranean.

The fate of the Balearics had a relationship to the fate of Septem (Ceuta, Sebta) in Mauretania II Tingitana. The Muslims maintained pressure on the remaining traces of Byzantine authority. Their operations against the Balearics were a prelude of some kind to their invasion of Spain in 711, but their primary focus was probably (no explicit documents exist concerning motivation or strategy here) the protection of newly won Muslim gains along the North African littoral. This operation preceded the actual Muslim invasion of Spain. It is evidence for their aggressive and thorough attention to eradicating traces of Byzantine power in the region. Muslims in the east and west profited from the internal Byzantine disension that resulted from the violent overthrow of the last Heraclian emperor, Justinian II, in 695 and his violent and controversial but short-lived return to power between 705 and 711. Emperor Justinian II had too many other internal and external problems to be able to engage in a strenuous defense of the distant Balearics or in another attempt to restore Byzantine authority in North Africa, which had collapsed after his first reign. Carthage fell to the Muslims in 698, following his first reign which lasted from 685 to 695.

³⁹ The Byzantines retained some kind of presence on the Balearics in the seventh century: Amengual i Batle 2005; cf. Vallejo Girvés 1993: 354–71. Perhaps Byzantine presence persisted more than a century longer: Signes Codoñer 2007.

The sources are sparse and poor, but the issue of the Balearics deserves scholarly attention. Inhabitants of the Balearics receive no specific mention as participants in the defense of North Africa against the Muslims. Information is simply very poor on what was happening there.⁶⁶ No details exist concerning the numbers of Byzantine forces or the names of their commanders or the character of Byzantine administrative control on the islands. How well informed Constantinople was about these developments, and the extent of coordination, is likewise unknown. But these operations were part of the process of the attenuation and receding of Byzantine power and presence, and the consolidation of Muslim authority, in the far west. They contributed to the tightening of Muslim control over the coast of North Africa. These developments were a fitting postscript to earlier Muslim actions against the Byzantines in North Africa and constituted part of the dismantling of Byzantium in the western Mediterranean. The Muslims took advantage of the attenuation of Byzantine power in the western Mediterranean and managed, whether by intention or inadvertently, to appropriate or inherit significant portions of its former strategic territories. Papyrological sources indicate that levies on Muslim-occupied Egypt provided human and material resources for the Muslim naval operations along the North Africa coast at the beginning of the eighth century.⁶⁷

It would be false and excessively Eurocentric to imagine that the Muslim conquest of North Africa was a conscious part of any long-term plan on their part to invade and conquer Spain. There is no convincing evidence for any original plan of Muslims, of course, to conquer North Africa in order that they might cross into Europe and conquer Spain and beyond, although Ṭabarī transmits a rather dubious tradition that Caliph 'Uthmān b. 'Affān stated that the road to Constantinople lay through Spain ("Only through Spain can Constantinople be conquered. If you conquer [Spain] you will share the reward of those who conquer [Constantinople]").⁶⁸ The conquest of Spain followed the course of events in North Africa, it did not cause them. Muslim expansion in the far western stretches of the Mediterranean derived from exploitation of emerging military, political, and religious opportunities and was not a change of direction in military operations because of the Muslim failure to conquer Constantinople in 678. Some modern historians of the Roman Empire may be correct that

⁶⁶ Zucca 1998: 115, 140–1, 211–13; Campaner y Fuertes 1987: 54–5; Amengual i Barle 2005.

⁶⁷ In the year 703–4 CE: Bell in Becker and Bell 1911: 279; Bell 1911: 279; Trombley 2004: 207.

⁶⁸ *Al-Ṭabarī Tārīkh* 1: 2817. Translation from al-Ṭabarī, *History* vol. xv: trans. R. S. Humphreys 1990: 22.

the primary interest for Rome's maintenance of a presence in Mauretania Tingitana in earlier centuries was the protection of the Roman and Late Roman interests in southern Spain. In fact Mauri from North Africa had raided Roman Spain on more than one occasion long before the Muslims crossed the straits in 711.⁵⁹ But the situation had changed by the middle and late seventh century from that of earlier Roman policies. The Byzantine occupation and protection and safeguarding of mid and late seventh-century Africa Proconsularis and Byzacena and Numidia did not derive from any concern with modest holdings in Byzantine Spain, which, by the commencement of the Muslim invasions of North Africa, and indeed since the 620s, had already been lost decisively by the Byzantines to the Visigoths.⁶⁰

TERMINATION OF BYZANTINE RESISTANCE

One Byzantinist expresses surprise at the indifference or reticence of the inhabitants of North Africa to cooperate with Byzantine central authorities: "The Arabs were at their very gates and yet the population of Carthage rebelled against the authorities, refusing to pay the new impositions. What precisely took place is hard to say."⁶¹ Again, the same scholar remarks "It is very odd indeed that even those inhabitants of Africa who had suffered the looting expeditions of the Arabs had no desire to cooperate with the Byzantine officials for the creation of a good military organization."⁶² However, the situation in North Africa is not a total mystery. Part of the explanation may be the locals' fear that their taxes were going back to the benefit of Constantinople and Anatolia and were not primarily being used to defend North Africa. There were misunderstandings. Despite dynastic ties, the Heraclian dynasty did not know how to raise revenues, conciliate, and raise the morale and fighting ethos of its North African subjects.

The Chalcedonian/Orthodox monastic group of Maximus the Confessor, according to a Syriac Life of Maximus which is Monophysite in theology and therefore very hostile to Maximus, lived at Hippo Diarrhytus, that is modern Bizerte, Tunisia, until fear of the Muslims forced them to flee to Sicily and then further north. Here is another case of flight from North Africa to Italy or to Byzantine-controlled islands such as Pantelleria or Lampedusa or Sicily. Ecclesiastical dissent concerning Monotheletism

⁵⁹ Arce 2005: 344-5. ⁶⁰ García Moreno 2002.

⁶¹ Stratos 1968-80: III: 222. ⁶² Stratos 1968-80: III: 251.

was at its height in 645–6, just on the eve of the first great Muslim raids in strength, by ‘Abd Allāh b. Sa’d b. Abī Sarḥ in 647/8.

The outspoken Chalcedonian ecclesiastic Maximus the Confessor was a friend of Anastasius, who was his pupil and came from Africa. In the words of his hostile Monophysitic biographer:

... because Africa was in rebellion against the emperor at this time, Maximus was encouraged, and at once took Anastasios and the other brethren with him, and they went up and came to Africa.

Now Anastasios was well known in these regions, having been born there, as we mentioned before. They set off and arrived at a monastery at the upper tip of Africa, called in Latin Hippo Diarrhytus, where some students from Nisibis were living. The abbot of the monastery was Esha’ya, and there was his son, called Isho’. There were about eighty-seven monks there, and they were Nestorians ...

... they led astray the whole of Africa, and there was no one who disputed with them in Africa, apart from one God-loving recluse named Luke.

... After they had sown their tares and led astray as many as they could in Africa, even deceiving the eparch there, whose name was George, they then removed from there and came to Sicily, fear of the Arabs having disturbed them – for by their agency the wrath of God had reached the whole of Africa. ... For, following the wicked Maximus, the wrath of God punished every place which had accepted his error.

The students who had been in the monastery of Hippo Diarrhytus, which we mentioned above, fled in front of the Arabs, and came up to Rome, where they were received by Martinos as having the same faith as he, and he gave them a monastery called in the Latin tongue *Cellae novae*, which means “nine cells.”⁶¹

The anonymous Monophysite author of this polemical text ascribed the fall of Byzantine Africa to the Muslims to divine wrath because of Christological error and blasphemy on the part of Maximus and his followers. Once again, events are seen through the filter of the Christological Controversy. The Monophysite text provides a glimpse into the last decades of Byzantine North Africa, including the flight of Chalcedonian monks from North Africa to Sicily, and thence to Italy. This text probably originated between 662 and 681 CE, so it is a contemporary glimpse of or commentary on events, although it has no pretensions to objectivity. It is a distorted echo of opposing Monophysitic and imperial (Monotheletic) propaganda, which attributed the responsibility for the fall of Africa

⁶¹ Brock 1973: 317–19; quotation 318. Skepticism about this Monophysitic-skewed vita: Bracke 1980: 429; Flusin 1992: II: 366–8. Supporting its credibility: Boudignon 2004.

to Maximus the Confessor and his own attraction of divine wrath as punishment for his theological errors and misconduct. It expresses the mentality of one constituency of Christians at that time, albeit an untypical and small Monophysite sect to which few North Africans ever belonged. It is similar to opinions of the contemporary Chalcedonian ascetic St. Anastasius the Sinaite that Christian sufferings at the hands of Arabs were an affliction that resulted from divine punishment.⁶⁴ North Africa's Latin Christians lacked any Anastasius the Sinaite who was able to appropriate and reinterpret and reconstruct the memory of the recent past from the perspective of Chalcedonian Christians. Yet the writings of Anastasius the Sinaite and experiences of other contemporary Christians in Palestine and Egypt offered no solution for North African Christians' predicament under "Arab" or Muslim domination. North African Christians possessed a rich monastic tradition, but they managed to preserve nothing equivalent to Chalcedonian Christians' triumphalist hold on such prestigious eastern Christian sites as St. Catherine's on Mount Sinai.

It is impossible to trace precisely Muslim expansion or Byzantine flight or collapse in northwestern North Africa after the Muslim capture of Carthage. Extant literary and non-literary sources do not permit it. The names of the last Byzantine commanders of ground forces in North Africa are unknown, except for the hapless patrician John, whom Emperor Leontius sent with a major naval force from Constantinople. The operations on the part of Muslim commanders involved complex co-optation and persuasion and coaxing of and negotiation with autochthonous peoples more than any outright military campaigning or battle. No one recorded these in writing. Muslim motives and planning may have been opportunistic. Muslims initially penetrated successfully where Byzantine and local resistance faded. Muslim triumphs and amassing of booty in North Africa affected the balance of forces in the Muslim civil wars, in particular the relative strength of Mu'āwiya, the Marwānids, and Ibn al-Zubayr.⁶⁵ But the Byzantine Empire and military forces under direct Byzantine control ceased to be a significant belligerent or coordinator of resistance against the Muslims anywhere in North Africa after the beginning of the eighth century. Extant sources do not permit historians to understand issues of co-existence of Muslim and Christian communities in North Africa as well as they can in Syria during the transitional period

⁶⁴ Anastasius Sinaita, *Questiones et responsiones* 65.39–43, 101.2–36 (Richard and Munitiz): 116–17, 161–3.

⁶⁵ Paul M. Cobb 2010 in press.

between Christian and Islamic societies.⁶⁶ There are tempting places for inhabitants to flee in parts of what is Tunisia today: parts of Cape Bon peninsula, hills near Pheradi Maius, and especially in the north, near Beja (Vaga) and Tabarka, Sicca Veneria (Le Kef) and presumably into Numidia, which is now part of Algeria, but success in hiding would have required of the Romano-African population cooperation and friendship with the autochthonous populations. The relationship of the Byzantines with the autochthonous tribes had often not been a happy one since 533. The old strategy of establishing fortified places to which the local population could flee had worked to an extent against autochthonous raids, but it had not worked in Syria and would prove to be a fatal trap in some instances, if we believe Ibn Nāji's narrative of what happened at Adna/Zabi Justiniana, for example. The strength of "the Romans" ebbed henceforth in the region of Zabi Justiniana, according to Ibn Nāji.⁶⁷ However, by the seventh century there was no longer any clear binary division between autochthonous and Roman populations in North Africa.⁶⁸

A few islands off the coast of Tunisia offer refugees a temporary resting place and some safety: Kerkennah and Jirba, but these are vulnerable and cannot hold out indefinitely if the mainland is controlled by a hostile power.⁶⁹ There is no jagged coastline here like those of the island-studded Aegean or Adriatic, which both offer many places to hide. Nor are there very many defensible peninsulas in North Africa; the great exception is Septem or Ceuta far to the west to which access can be sealed (like Monemvasia in the Peloponnesus) with modest numbers of soldiers. Although one should not forget the peninsular site of later Faṭimid Mahdia in Tunisia, it was not a significant stronghold in this era.

Unlike the situation of inhabitants of Syria or Egypt it was possible for many Christian inhabitants of Byzantine North Africa to flee to such islands as Pantelleria, Lampedusa, Malta, Sicily, Sardinia, Corsica, the Balearic Islands, or even Italy or Spain.⁷⁰ It appears that is just what many did over a period of time, even though we do not have their accounts or the accounts of the crews and captains in whose ships they sailed. This

⁶⁶ Thoughtful exploration by Khalek 2006. ⁶⁷ Ibn Nāji, *Mā'lim* 1: 49.

⁶⁸ As Bruce Hitchner has observed in conversation.

⁶⁹ The exact date of the Muslim capture of the islands of Kerkennah is unknown: Mahfoudh 2000: 649.

⁷⁰ Ibn Khaldūn, *Ta'rikh* IV: 223, VII: 11. But Ibn Khaldūn may, more than half a millennium later, conflate population flight in the seventh and early eighth century with much later flight of Christians from the North African coasts in the wake of the Crusades.

absence of records is somewhat surprising.⁷¹ Some Muslim texts report that they fled by ship to Spain, Sicily, the island of Pantellaria, or Italy. Among the exodus was probably the later Abbot Hadrian of England.⁷² North Africans had fled to Spain to escape autochthonous unrest long before the Muslim conquests. Likewise North African monastics had fled to Sicily and North Africa earlier to escape Vandalic Arian persecutions.⁷³ Flight to Spain to escape the Muslims simply continued those earlier precedents.⁷⁴ Some may have sought to link up with earlier knots of refugee settlement, but we have no specific proof of this.⁷⁵ North African refugees and expatriates lost their cohesion and dissolved into the European populations and communities where they fled. They did not establish or maintain distinctive neighborhoods or communal memories or organizations.

Subsequent Muslim policies towards autochthonous populations in the far west of North Africa – that is, in parts of what is now northern Morocco – are important but lie outside of the scope of this investigation. Byzantium was not directly involved in the creation, shaping, and implementation of those policies or outcomes. Its chroniclers record nothing about them.

⁷¹ An effort to collect information on the relationship and transmittal of saints' cults and manuscripts from Africa to Europe in Late Antiquity and the early medieval period: S. R. Graham 2005; Conant 2010.

⁷² On Hadrian's probable flight from Cyrenaica to Italy, Bischoff and Lapidge 1994: 90–2.

⁷³ Gavigan 1962: 253–6. ⁷⁴ Ibn Khaldūn, *Ta'rikh* IV: 223, VI: 10.

⁷⁵ Case of the monk Donatus, who fled with seventy monks and many manuscripts, from Africa in 570 or 571, during grave tribal unrest: Hildefonse, *De viris illustribus*, IV, 1n: PL 96. Also Nactus who fled to Lusitania from Africa sometime between 568 and 586: *Vitae patrum Emeritenisium*, III: *Acta Sanctorum* vol. 62, Nov. 1 (1887) 321. Modéran 2003a: 669, 675–6.

The failures of two cities of Constantine

The fortunes and failures of Carthage, Constantinople, and Constantine (in Numidia) were intertwined in the errors, miscommunication, and confusion that characterized the Byzantine component of the dynamics of seventh-century North African change. But some of these patterns appear elsewhere in the contemporary Byzantine Empire. A few observations are in order about similarities between Islamic conquests of Byzantine-controlled territories in western Asia and North Africa. Significant changes have occurred in scholarly understanding of the early Islamic conquests in Iraq, Palestine, and northern Mesopotamia, although no consensus has developed. Some of these changes in scholarship have implications for studying Islamic conquests in North Africa. However Arabic texts concerning seventh-century Palestine and Syria and upper Mesopotamia at least occasionally use precise titles and also name institutions. Such terms cannot have been invented retrospectively. Those specifications are regrettably lacking in the earliest as well as later Muslim narratives about campaigns in North Africa, even though, as in the case of Syria, the subject of the narratives is conquest – *futūḥ*.

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF CONDITIONS IN
NORTH AFRICA AND IN THE EAST

Comparative analysis identifies similarities and dissimilarities between the dynamics of mid-seventh-century events in Africa and those in the eastern Mediterranean, both of which involved Byzantium's confrontations with campaigns of Islamic conquest. The following features are similar in Africa and the eastern Mediterranean:

- 1 Bishops in both regions feared that Byzantine officials would confiscate their plate and other wealth.

- 2 According to the Maghribi tradent al-Mālikī, the Byzantines in Africa preferred to avoid open combat against the Muslims: that strategy resembled their practices in the east, especially after the Byzantine disaster at the Yarmūk in 636.¹
- 3 In North Africa as in Syria and Palestine the Muslim armies first avoided the large cities with their walls and garrisons, seeking to bypass such centers by making penetrations into countryside that often lay away from the sea.
- 4 In neither region did Christian leaders proclaim holy war. One should moreover exercise caution in evaluating the role of the concept of *jihād* in the actual seventh-century Muslim conquest of North Africa. Extant contemporary sources are skimpy and do not explicitly refer to it. Late sources may interpolate later conceptions into the seventh-century events.² Attributions of crusading ideology to Heraclius are misleading and in any case no distinctive Christian crusading mentality arose or spread in seventh-century Byzantine North Africa.
- 5 In both regions eschatological fears emerged before, during, and after the Muslim conquests.³
- 6 Internal strife within Byzantium and within the Muslim community strongly affected the course and pace of military and political developments.
- 7 The very act of transferring Byzantine troops from one military theater to another, that is, from North Africa or Numidia to Egypt or Anatolia or the reverse, became the context for a number of outbreaks of unrest that negatively affected Byzantine military effectiveness.
- 8 Some would prefer to restate problems and premises. Hence Muslim historians reasonably object even to phrasing questions or investigations to explain why the Byzantines failed to manage to hold on to Africa, just as other Muslim historians of a somewhat later period, such as those of Ottoman history, have objected to Byzantinists' efforts to explain why Byzantium failed to check the Seljuks in the eleventh or the Ottomans in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth century. They would prefer to express it in a different way: Why should the Muslims or Seljuks or Ottoman Turks not have succeeded and the Byzantines

¹ Al-Mālikī, *Riyād* 1: 17–18. Cf. Idris 1969: c. 20, p. 128.

² Donner 1991; Morabia 1993; Bonner 2006 *contra* Ball 2000: 29, "Heraclius' proclamation of holy war has its exact counterpoint in the Islamic concept of *jihād*, first traditionally articulated by Muhammad in the very same year – 622 – that Heraclius formulated his." On the issue of holy war in Byzantium: Treadgold 2006: 211–18.

³ Greenwood 2002.

not have succumbed? Why should anyone expect that the Byzantines could have managed to endure indefinitely? That is a matter of differing perspective, but it is sobering to take it into account.⁴

- 9 Long-term structural weaknesses of Byzantine military unrest weakened Byzantine military effectiveness in North Africa as it did in Syria and upper Mesopotamia. The unrest revealed fissures in both regions from the sixth century up to the respective Islamic conquests.

Comparative analysis also finds divergences in Byzantine experiences in the east and North Africa:

- 1 North African, Italian, Sardinian, and Sicilian landowners resented and protested higher Byzantine taxes, according to both Arab and Latin sources. This feature receives no mention in the east.
- 2 In contrast to Anatolia, no rough frontier zone or region of zonal interaction (borderlands) and Byzantine–Muslim interdependence and interpenetration emerged in North Africa.
- 3 Compulsory population transfers by Byzantium were not a feature of its military policies in North Africa, unlike those it sought to implement from time to time in southeastern Europe and western Asia.
- 4 North Africa did not fall quickly to the Muslims in contrast to former Byzantine-controlled Syria, Mesopotamia, and Egypt.

The explanation for this last difference is complex and has not received adequate investigation by modern historians.⁵ The Muslim conquest of even what is now Tunisia (Ifriqiya) took decades. The Byzantines had already exerted some kind of authority in North Africa for more than a century when the Muslims began their raids. Byzantine-African armed resistance lasted another fifty years in North Africa, while such resistance collapsed after five years or so in Syria, Palestine, and upper Mesopotamia. The battle at or near Sbeitla in 647 had shattering results, but those of the battle of the Yarmūk in the east were more immediate and more comprehensive. More physical damage occurred in the wake of the conquests in North Africa, although later Muslim sources put the blame on autochthonous people's (or "Berbers") as some Muslims and Europeans would put it scorched-earth policies, most notably those of Kāhina.⁶ Later Muslim traditions speak of more civilian and military casualties, including deaths, in North Africa than in the east. However,

⁴ Conversations at The University of Chicago Quadrangle Club with my Ottoman History colleague Halil Inalcik sometime in the 1970s or 1980s.

⁵ Marçais 2003: 27–9; Laroui 1970: 83–4. ⁶ Al-Mālikī, *Riyāḍ* 53–4.

the modern historian will likely be skeptical about any numbers in the sources for losses in either the civilian or military sectors in North Africa. Different conditions prevailed in the east, where more swiftly negotiated surrenders were the normal practice.

One hypothesis theorizes that ideological convictions were decisive in the empire's earlier seventh-century successful weathering of the Persian offensives and in the stiffening of Byzantine resistance, and that each Persian punishing blow actually reinforced Byzantine morale because each Persian victory purged more Byzantine sins. Such a model will not explain the dynamics of Byzantine and Roman-African resistance that operated during the Muslim conquest of North Africa.⁷ Ibn Khaldūn many centuries later ascribed the slowness of the Muslim conquest to the numerous, complex, and difficult tribal and familial loyalties among the autochthonous inhabitants – for him the Barbar, the Berbers.⁸

The Muslim conquest of North Africa was more complex and more violent despite the eventual decisiveness and success of Muslim leaders' delicate negotiations with autochthonous populations and towns. This was ultimately a dynamic process, which grew exponentially from initially modest raids. Muslims profited from Byzantine and autochthonous mistakes and vulnerabilities. The Byzantines and North African autochthonous populations for their part never maximized their potential for viable armed resistance. Several layers of problems impeded the creation of any effective defense.

Byzantium and the Early Islamic polity had asymmetrical (opposing) relationships and strategy. Early seventh-century Byzantium was a maritime as well as land-based empire that controlled critical sea lanes and ports in the Mediterranean from east to west. Travel and communications depended on control of maritime lanes. But it was also a major land power with deployment and concentration of its best soldiers and commanders in north Syria, upper Mesopotamia, and the edges of Armenia. Defeat and withdrawal from Syria and upper Mesopotamia and the disappearance of financial resources from Egypt suddenly transformed the Byzantine Empire into an unstable and ultimately untenable entity, with a core at and around Constantinople and Anatolia, and other critical but scattered territories in Sicily, Sardinia, the Balearic Islands, and North Africa. The earliest Muslim conquests in Palestine had permanently severed overland communications between these core points and placed Muslims in a central internal position to expand in either or both directions, north

⁷ Howard-Johnston 2004: 99. ⁸ Ibn Khaldūn, *Ta'rikh* 1: 174, 394.

and west. Events in the east created a powerful synergism for Muslims that Byzantine North Africa was unable to escape. The bloodstained final decades of Byzantine North Africa were in part a consequence of the waning ability of the empire to project power effectively westward from Constantinople. The attenuation of Byzantine authority brought violence in its wake that some historians would regard as a normal messy accompaniment of the dismantling of an empire.⁹

The decisive Muslim military operations, in so far as historical memory preserves any record of them, occurred in more or less open country, with some but limited rainfall, that lay away from the coast and considerably to the south of the most fertile agricultural land and likewise south of the most familiar Roman archaeological sites in North Africa such as Carthage, Dougga, Thuburbo Maius, Bulla Regia, and Hippo Regius. That is the situation in Numidia as well as in Zeugitana (the former Africa Proconsularis). That kind of terrain was better suited for maneuver and combat for the Muslims.

The Byzantine government encouraged defense of Byzantine North Africa but that policy required payment of a price. The dynasty's prestige and considerable resources were at stake. But how did Byzantine government encourage resistance? A very few fragmentary references in Arabic texts mention instances of earlier Byzantine governmental efforts to whip up resistance elsewhere, in Syria, Palestine, and Egypt, against Muslims.¹⁰

It did not prove possible for the Byzantines to turn the Muslim leaders against one another or to assassinate or trap and kidnap them at a pre-arranged parley, which had been a preferred Roman and Byzantine way of eliminating dangerous barbarian chiefs over a long period.¹¹ The presence of Islam complicated Byzantine defensive strategy and practices in North Africa. The new religion provided a new cohesiveness that did not previously exist. This does not mean that notions of holy war dominated Muslim strategy and practices. That is probably a false deduction – and an exaggeration. But the Muslim commanders were both moved and unified by their new religion, whether or not their soldiers in the ranks shared their religious fervor and knowledge. Byzantium and Rome had

⁹ Maier 2006: 70–3, 110–11.

¹⁰ In Syria: Al-Azdi, Abū Ismā'īl Muḥammad b. 'Abd Allāh al-Baṣrī, *Tarikh futūḥ al-Shām*, ed. W. N. Lees 23 (Calcutta: 1857); al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh* (via Sayf) 1: 2104, cf. 1: 2086; Ibn al-Athīr, *Kāmil* 11: 406–7, 413–15, 317–18; Ibn A'tham, *Kitāb al-futūḥ* 1.100–1. In Egypt: Photiades 1963: 34–5.

¹¹ The Romans had engaged in such practices as early as the kidnapping of Jugurtha at a parley: Sallust, *Bellum Jugurthinum* 112–13. On the massacre of eighty autochthonous leaders at a parley at the hands of *dux limitis* Sergius at Leptis Magna in 543/4, Diehl 1896: 340–1; sv. "Sergius 4," *PLRE* 3: 1124–5.

not confronted that before. It made it more difficult for the Byzantines to corrupt and divide their opponents from the east. They could not use the same techniques that they had employed to co-opt, kidnap, or slay autochthonous leaders. But Muslims did not always remain united. The first two Muslim *fitnas* (pl. *fitan*) or civil wars in Syria and Iraq gave important respite to the Byzantines in Africa and elsewhere even though the outcomes of these civil wars were beyond the ability of Byzantines to incite, control, or steer.

Suspicious and gaps in confidence between the Byzantine government and ecclesiastics and local civilian populations probably grew to worse proportions in North Africa than in the Levant. Some historians have argued that the long process of Romanization had predisposed the diverse peoples settled around the Mediterranean to believe that reciprocal ties of allegiance and responsibility existed between themselves and a leader in a distant seat of government who might be indifferently known to them as Caesar and recognized chiefly by means of images and slogans on coins, statues, and monuments in cities and official portraits in the buildings of local authorities.¹² If so, that vision broke down in seventh-century North Africa. The Byzantine defense of North Africa suffered more complications and damage from Christian religious strife than did that of the Levant.¹³ Suspicion and fear of betrayal were widespread.

The seventh-century Byzantines succeeded in limiting if not stopping Muslim invasions of Anatolia, but there the territorial depth and the imperative of saving Constantinople, together with very mountainous terrain, gave Byzantium more advantages. North Africa had mountains, but not ones distributed to create the kind of defensive barrier that the Taurus Mountains did.¹⁴ North Africa was larger than Anatolia with a staggering number of places to guard in the Dorsal region of Tunisia and in the Numidian plains and gaps in the Tebessa and Constantinois regions and in the Aures and Hodna Mountains. The relative proximity of Constantinople to the empire's eastern frontier was another military and diplomatic advantage. Communications from Constantinople were longer and slower with North Africa. No ideal nerve center existed anywhere in North Africa for coordinating Byzantine and autochthonous defenses. Carthage had advantages as a major and excellent port, but also deficiencies.

¹² Here I paraphrase Pazdernik 2005: 188.

¹³ Estimation of relative role of religious internal strife in impeding Byzantine defenses against Muslims in Syria and Palestine: Kaegi 1995: 236–87.

¹⁴ Gsell 1972: I: 20–39.

Byzantine resistance in Anatolia could be and was in fact directed from Constantinople, and that may have assisted its defense.¹⁵ But it was impractical or at any rate inefficient to direct the defense of North Africa from Constantinople. Communications and logistics were too slow and unreliable. The defense of some of the most defensible regions of Byzantine North Africa, such as Numidia, could not be efficiently directed from Constantinople, or from Sicily, southern Italy, Sardinia, or even from Carthage. The dynamics were different.

Analogies from the defense of Byzantine Anatolia break down. Anatolia was far from homogeneous in population, but it was much more so than Byzantine North Africa. The Byzantines failed to develop a strategy that coordinated imperial interests with those of local Romanized inhabitants in North Africa, whether landowners or not, and the autochthonous tribalized populations. They failed to develop any coordinated response with Visigoths in Spain. Eventually, yet only gradually, military reforms occurred in Anatolia, but the institutions and soldiers were coordinated from a not-too-distant Constantinople. A comparable model would not work in North Africa, which lay further away from Constantinople. The autochthonous populations of North Africa had their own effective ways of waging war, but they were never directly and specifically involved in any Byzantine military reforms. They struggled to protect their grazing lands and granaries. The historicity of Byzantine military reforms in Anatolia and the Balkans remains extremely controversial and poorly documented.¹⁶ The creation of respective *magistri militum* for Byzacena and Numidia¹⁷ in the late sixth century indicates some Byzantine effort to devise and enable a military command for the defense of those strategically important and vulnerable provinces, but it in no way demonstrates any radically new social and economic structures and military reforms. In any case no secure evidence exists for any Byzantine themal reform in late seventh-century North Africa.

North Africa lacked the best Byzantine generals, the best troops, and simply put, priority, even though the reigning Heraclian dynasty had strong and long-lived North African sentimental ties. It is not surprising, given the apparent lack of quality among Byzantine military commanders in North Africa, that after Heraclius no commander who had served in North Africa is known to have used his skills or his fame from serving

¹⁵ Haldon and Kennedy 1980. ¹⁶ Synthetic overview: Haldon 1997a.

¹⁷ But Zografopoulos 2006 unconvincingly dates these to the late seventh century, to the 670s or later.

in Africa to promote in his own military career, except for Tiberius II Apsimar, who briefly seized power profiting in 698 from the mutiny of dissatisfied sailors who had been sent to aid North Africa under the patrician John by Emperor Leontius during the death rattle of Byzantine rule in Africa.¹⁸ The Heraclian dynasty may in fact have, in its unceasing efforts to assure its self-perpetuation and internal security, sought to assure that no one else would repeat Heraclius' seizure of power from Africa. There may have been a policy of appointing only commanders who were perceived to be non-threatening but who therefore were also likely to be mediocre. The heavy heritage of earlier Byzantine military unrest impeded and set limits to imperial efforts to construct an effective and energetic defense of Byzantine Africa. There is no information about any Byzantine commander who served in North Africa later using his military service and record in North Africa or his knowledge about conditions because of service there to help himself in his career back in Constantinople or Anatolia or the Balkans. There simply is no information about such careers and probably this is a kind of implicit testimony to the undistinguished level of Byzantine military appointees there. No great Byzantine victories occurred in North Africa against the Muslims, so service on this front probably added no luster to anyone's credentials or fame among Byzantine commanders. It is unclear whether there was any ideal commander who could have solved Byzantium's political, military, and religious problems in North Africa. None emerged from the ranks of the Byzantines.

It is impossible to ascertain to what degree the Byzantines and their defense of North Africa profited from seventh-century Byzantine experiences with fighting and checking (or attempting to check) Muslims in Syria and Anatolia, or vice versa. The Byzantine officers in North Africa included significant numbers of Armenians, including, for example, John *dux* of Tigisis, on the eve of the arrival of the Muslims. How well these Armenian commanders adapted to African and Numidian military challenges and realities is unclear. So the military effectiveness of the Armenian commanders who occupied many posts in seventh-century Byzantine Africa remains an open question. It is difficult to evaluate just how well they interacted with Roman and autochthonous constituencies. They brought valuable military experiences from fronts in Syria and upper Mesopotamia, Armenia, and Anatolia, but how well they adapted those experiences to North African challenges is unclear, and in the end in the

¹⁸ Nicephorus, *Short History* 41 (Mango): 98–9; Theophanes, *Chron.*, AM 6190 (De Boor 370; Mango and Scott 517); Zuckerman 2005: 122–3.

ultimate test, military operations, they succumbed. Probably Muslims for their part profited from their military experiences in the east in order to adjust their strategies and tactics in Africa as did the Byzantines. In Anatolia the Muslims did not succeed in establishing *amṣār*¹⁹ like Qayrawān.

Timing worked against the Byzantines. A period of confusion followed the shocking defeat and death of the rebel Gregory and his Romano-African elites at or near Sbeitla. In terms of Byzantine history, one can think of parallels such as the disastrous chaos that followed the defeat and capture of Emperor Romanos IV Diogenes at the battle of Mantzikert in 1071. The assassination of Constans II in 669 in turn opened another decisive sequence of major opportunities for the Muslims in North Africa. The rise of a Bulgarian menace in the Balkans during the 680s escalated pressures on and diverted attention for Constantinople. The overthrow of Justinian II in 695 and the ensuing crisis of imperial succession created even more opportunities for the Muslims to finish off Byzantine rule in North Africa. It is worth asking the question of how much Byzantine control remained in Africa after the rebellion of usurper Gregory and the Muslim victory at or near Sbeitla. The best answer seems to be that some Byzantine authority remained, but that it was weak. Nominally this was still the Byzantine Empire that was in control, for imperial coinage was struck at Carthage until the end of the first reign of Justinian II (695) (see Figure 10 for a solidus of Justinian II from the Carthage mint).²⁰ Yet local autonomous decisions and resort to arms and to negotiations became part of the *de facto* situation in North Africa.

NORTH AFRICANS' MEMORIES

Local Romano-African elites have not left much of a written record in any language from this period. What did they want? Did they understand what was happening to the east of them during the conquests? Muslim sources do not imply that the Romano-African Christian population of Africa welcomed or was indifferent to the Muslims. The Romano-African reaction was one of resistance or at least fear. Any accommodation they made with the Muslims was under duress. They did not rush to escape some kind of oppressive Byzantine yoke even though some, perhaps many,

¹⁹ Military settlements. Ibn Khaldūn, *Ta'rikh* VII: 10, uses the term *amṣār* even for military settlements of the "Franks" (Latins, Byzantines) in North Africa.

²⁰ "Twenty Years of Anarchy," in the phrasing of Bury 1889/1966: II: 352–86; cf. Kaegi 1981a: 186–208.



Figure 10 Solidus of Justinian II from the Carthage mint. Date ?695/6?
DO Cat 2,2 no. 28 BCZ 48.17.2359.D2009. © Dumbarton Oaks,
Byzantine Collection, Washington, DC.

probably had many grievances with Byzantine authority. The writings of the now chronologically remote St. Augustine of Hippo (d. 430 CE) offered no clear-cut advice or consolation for the new circumstances of the seventh-century empire and Africa. It is not evident that Augustine's writings had any impact whatever on seventh-century policymaking or local reactions.

One must ask, why did the Christian inhabitants of North Africa leave no records of their experiences in those years? There are no reports of martyrdoms in a land that was replete with martyrs in the second and third centuries CE.²¹ In fact there were cases of slaughter and mass kidnappings of Christians in North Africa that could create the kinds of incidents that provide cases of martyrdom. The absence of such records of martyrdoms again is consistent with what happened in Syria and Palestine, although there, in at least one instance, there was the – significantly – Latin narration of the sixty martyrs of Gaza who met their deaths in 637.²² But there is no narration of any Christian martyrs at Sbeitla, Susa (Sousse), Carthage, or Vaga/Beja. That is consistent for both Latin and Greek hagiographic literatures. Unlike Egypt, no known rebellion of Christians occurred anywhere in North Africa against the Muslims after the initial years of

²¹ Earlier African martyrs: S. R. Graham 2005: 55–100; Saxer 1980; Frend 2004.

²² Delehaye 1904; Pargoire 1905; Woods 2003b, repr. in Bonner 2005: 429–50. I agree with Woods' 2003b criticism, n. 3, p. 430, of the excessive skepticism that Robert Hoyland 1997 expressed about this text. But I myself am skeptical about Woods' excessively ingenious arguments in favor of a date of 639 CE for events: Kaegi 2003c: 252–3, esp. n. 51, p. 253.

Muslim conquest. The explanation for this silence is unclear. The first decades of the seventh century had their Christian martyrs. The cults of martyrs were still growing in North Africa, even in Numidia (Teleghma, Telergma) as inscriptions testify. In the east the new cult of St. Anastasius the Persian arose in the 630s. Christian martyrology at the hands of Sasānian Zoroastrian persecutors flourished among seventh-century Christians in upper Mesopotamia.²³ The church in North Africa honored its martyrs at the hands of the Arian Vandals. Yet the most potent seventh-century North African martyr in the period of the Islamic conquests was 'Uqba b. Nāfi', who was a Muslim of the tribe of Quraysh, not a Christian. Muslims developed and cherished their own narratives of remembrance about martyrdom, ascetic striving, and achievement in the years of their conquests.²⁴ Muslim merchants would participate in the scrapping, tearing out, and reuse of Latin manuscript Scriptural pages for commercial correspondence for the emerging new Muslim society in North Africa and Egypt.²⁵ No stories exist of Christian invocation of apotropaic powers of relics, images, or statuary against the Muslims in Byzacena, Zeugitana, Numidia, or Mauretania. No North African church or monastery survived as a symbol of successful resistance and endurance.

Historical memory of the Muslim conquest of North Africa associates more violence with it than was the case for Syria, Palestine, or Mesopotamia, or Egypt.²⁶ However historians should avoid simplistically interpreting all events and development within "the military model of the conquests."²⁷ It is difficult to find certain archaeological traces of such violence in North Africa or in the Levant. The conquest of North Africa involved more slaughter in combat, more massacres and more mass captivity of civilians, and, consequently, more terror and terror-induced flight.²⁸ This difference strikes the reader of Muslim accounts of what happened in North Africa, in contrast to their accounts of Muslim conquests in Syria, Mesopotamia, and Egypt.²⁹ Possibly this was a consequence of more actual resistance in North Africa, of local decisions to

²³ Walker 2005.

²⁴ For hypotheses about the genesis of such remembrances: Sizgorich 2009: 57–62, 149–84. Alternative and convincing view of martyrdom: D. B. Cook 2007: 12–30.

²⁵ Rāgib 1991: 2–9. The precise circumstances of the dismantling of this Biblical codex remains unknown.

²⁶ Kaegi 1995: 270–1.

²⁷ Apt comment by Donner 2005: 33–4, in ch. 2, "The Islamic conquests."

²⁸ Ibn Khaldūn, *Ta'rikh* vii: 11.

²⁹ Comment on effects of Muslim invasions elsewhere in the seventh century and contrasts with effects of Germanic invasions and occupations in Western Europe: Yerxa 2006: 31–3.

put up more resistance, and also in part of efforts from Constantinople to prevent local officials from making arrangements with the Muslims that drained away funds and also infringed on Byzantine sovereignty and the prerogatives of Constantinople to establish foreign policy and international relations in an empire with no recent tradition of local autonomy. In Syria the Byzantine government had long had commercial agents for dealing with Arabs. Often these men had abused their positions and dealt treacherously with local and transhumant Arabs, but at least there was some possibility for intermediaries to negotiate.³⁰ There was no such tradition in Africa and could not have been. That absence of any possible shared experience and tradition of negotiating with Arabs may have made it more difficult to come to settlements. The inhabitants of Syria and upper Mesopotamia and even of parts of Egypt had more acquaintance with Arabs than had the population of North Africa. The local populations in the east or their leaders knew better how to cope with Arabs, to reach some sort of accommodation.

The absence of any seventh-century local record in Latin in North Africa is somewhat surprising, but after all there is very little extant in the way of historical records from contemporary Italy as well. The absence of Byzantine travelers' reports is not surprising, because that is a genre that does not exist for the period.

The fortunes of Byzantine North Africa cannot be adequately understood without comprehension of the broader contours of seventh-century Byzantine and Islamic history. As important as they are, one needs to understand more than the events, conditions, and perspectives within the confines of North Africa. Ultimately what North Africans did would be most critical, but the wider context also provided the frame of reference for decision-making and the range of possible choices at that time.

It is uncertain how much transfer of information occurred between Byzantium's eastern frontier with Islam in Anatolia and North Africa, that is, how much useful experience was transferred and adapted for use by Byzantine commanders and officials in the other region against the Muslims. The trial of Maximus the Confessor at Constantinople provides a glimpse of one officer, John former *sakellarios* or treasurer of Peter, General of Numidia. John had served in North Africa before returning to Constantinople.³¹

³⁰ Shahid 1995: 1.1: 456–8, on *curatores*. ³¹ *The Life of Maximus the Confessor*, c. 52, pp. 140–3.

FRAGMENTED RESISTANCE

Resistance to the Muslims in North Africa, including Numidia, was fragmented from beginning to end. Regionalism and narrow parochial perspectives may have been at least as important as theological divisions in hindering the development of local resistance to the Muslims. As for the autochthonous peoples, many resisted, some with temporary effectiveness, as in the sensational case of Kāhina, the autochthonous chieftainess or sorceress, but autochthonous resistance was neither cohesive nor well coordinated either with the Byzantines or with others and, accordingly, eventually failed.³² Byzantines persisted in encouraging resistance against the Muslims in North Africa for financial and strategic as well as religious reasons. The Byzantines, from the perspective of Constantinopolitan elites, did not wish such valuable resources to fall into the hands of the Muslims. Old Africa Proconsularis or Zeugitana was the last place in North Africa where the Byzantines could have any possible chance of stopping the Muslims. Although in the coastal region of Zeugitana the Byzantines might still have used their warships and transport ships and their proximity to Sicily and Malta to advantage, logistical problems and lack of sufficient Byzantine naval and land forces made it impracticable to consider serious resistance by Byzantines, in contrast to autochthonous tribes, very far west of Carthage either by land or by sea. It became difficult for the Byzantines to conceive and implement a strategy for defending Numidia after Carthage fell.

The Byzantines wanted to hold on to North Africa although they lacked the resources to penetrate, transform, and control areas that their Roman predecessors had failed to master. North Africa was important to them. The Heraclian dynasty's prestige was at stake. The Byzantines would have resisted the Muslims in Africa in any case, but probably the Heraclian dynastic associations reinforced that determination to hold on. It may be significant that the final part of North Africa, Carthage, disappeared from Byzantine authority when a member of the Heraclian dynasty, Justinian II, had just been deposed: he was deposed in 695, and it fell into Muslim hands in 698. The Byzantine defense of North Africa was part of a larger strategy for the defense of Byzantine territories and interests in Sardinia, Sicily, southern Italy, and the Balearic Islands. It involved sea as well as land. But it was a great challenge to integrate and coordinate all of these.

³² Modéran 2003a: 753–4, 793–7.

The defense of Anatolia also involved eastern Mediterranean islands such as Cyprus, Crete, and the Dodecanese.

The Muslim conquest of North Africa did not initially succeed in the middle Maghrib and in the Sahara: it would occur only at the end of a long and slow process. That process would include a major shift of economic and political activity to the interior and to the west and southwest that is beyond the scope of this inquiry. The earliest Muslim successes in North Africa took place in the same eastern area of the Maghrib where other foreign invaders had won successes ever since the ancient Carthaginians and at the lowest possible cost. The initial Muslim invasions did not affect the southern and western areas of Morocco. As in the case of Germanic invasions of the Roman Empire in the fifth century, this was a drawn-out process, for the Muslims had just enough military power to establish their enclaves, taking two to three generations fully to erode the power of the empire.³³ Muslims managed to organize resources effectively in Egypt for overland and maritime operations in and around North Africa. Egypt's ports were better situated than Constantinople for the competition to control North Africa. Not unlike the Roman Empire in the fifth century, the seventh-century Byzantine Empire's internal limitations were a necessary factor in, but not alone a sufficient cause for, imperial collapse.³⁴

What is modern Tunisia today was among the first regions of North Africa conquered by the Muslims. Much of it was highly desirable agricultural and commercial territory and coastline, which supported substantial population. But reduction of the other areas of North Africa did not automatically follow from the conquest of what is modern Tunisia. The remaining territory required careful and thorough reduction through negotiations or systematic occupation and warfare, which in turn required commitment of many soldiers and readiness to take significant human and material losses.

The Muslims first established themselves in the vicinity of al-Qayrawān, which lay in a central position in the interior, away from the coast, from which they spread to conquer Cululis Theodoriana (Ayn Jallūla)³⁵ and nearby points south of the Dorsal hills. The province of Byzacena (Byzacium, Ar. Muzak) was overrun and many of its remaining inhabitants probably fled. Coastal towns in Byzacena such as Hadrumetum (Sousse) subsequently succumbed. Then came the turn of the adjacent rolling, fertile, and somewhat hilly Dorsal region. Carthage and the towns

³³ Note the observations of Heather 2005: 446.

³⁴ Heather 2005: 449. ³⁵ Pringle 1981: 196–7.

in the rougher interior, closer to Numidia, appear to have possessed better fortifications (either because interior sites are better preserved because of their isolation or because they had always been required to defend themselves against autochthonous raids), and held out longer. Except for the vicinity of Carthage, North African resistance increasingly became more autochthonous than Byzantine because it involved areas where only small numbers of Byzantines or descendants of Roman veterans lived³⁶ and ones in which autochthonous populations not only were more numerous but also probably believed that it was in their interest to resist. Many issues remain uncertain concerning the relationship of autochthonous peoples with Islam as well as with Christianity.³⁷

The Muslims in North Africa tended to make their strongest military strikes against the Byzantines and Romano-Africans in North Africa away from port areas, presumably out of fear of the Byzantine maritime capacity and possibly to avoid being bogged down in sieges of well-fortified and well-defended towns that might be at least temporarily sustained from the sea. That had also been a prominent feature of their conquests in Palestine and Syria: only very late did they move to occupy coastal points in the Levant.

The Muslim conquest of North Africa also enjoyed great benefits from the momentum, prestige, and confidence that came from so many earlier successful and even sensational Muslim conquests in the seventh century in Palestine, Syria, Mesopotamia, and Egypt. That was not the case at the beginning of their conquest of Syria. In Africa they could believe that they were already manifestly part of a winning cause, with divine favor. That created a winning dynamic that grew exponentially. It was without historical parallel. It encouraged belief or fear that it was an unstoppable and divinely favored trend. The Muslims were winning.

But the conquest cannot be understood as any simple contest or slugfest between Christians and Muslims. There were many complications and impediments for the Byzantines and some internal complications for Muslims as well. The Muslims did not triumph because of any superior technology.³⁸ However their reputed inability to carry out sieges is probably

³⁶ Of course we avoid totally the French colonial critique of the failure of defense as partially due to wrong policies of Roman settlement of colons: Mercier 1895–6: 193–5, “the Romans did not understand the unity of the native population,” p. 193, “we have better understood the native question than did our predecessors and teachers,” p. 194, “we have broken the unity and strength of the native race,” p. 195, “The Romans accomplished the conquest without a general plan ... they did not change their plan for dominating” p. 193.

³⁷ Crone and Cook 1977: 117–19. ³⁸ Kennedy 2006: 197.

exaggerated. They probably made great use of the camel to extend their range and ability to outflank fixed Byzantine positions. Questions concerning the role of the camel (dromedary) in the Muslim conquest of North Africa are inevitable. The primary sources, whether Greek, Latin, or Arabic, attribute no special role to the camel in Muslim or Byzantine military operations in seventh-century North Africa. Their silence does not answer the question. The latest scholarly opinion argues that extensive use of the camel in North Africa, despite earlier rupestrian drawings, dates from the fifth or sixth century CE.³⁹ The camel aided Muslim mobility but was not decisive in determining the outcome of military operations. Byzantines were also familiar with camels. The Byzantines did benefit from superior military engineering. But many forts in the interior, such as Ksar Lemsa, 'Ayn Tounga, Musti, the Numidian Tubursicu Numidarum, Tipasa (Numidia, modern Tifeche; not that of Caesariensis), or Ad Dianam, are essentially places for local security, not intended to withstand lengthy sieges. The same is true for the makeshift provisional fortification of the Capitulum at Sufetula (Sbeitla). The greatest Byzantine technological asset was naval knowledge and their naval and maritime assets,⁴⁰ but the Byzantines never exploited them to full advantage, although admittedly there were limits to any naval option: No navy could operate alone to save the North African interior from the Muslims.

FAILURE TO ESTABLISH CONVINCING IDENTITY OF INTERESTS WITH NORTH AFRICANS

The Byzantines failed to develop a strategy for harnessing the potential of the autochthonous tribes in Numidia. Carthage was the nerve center of Byzantine North Africa, but it was not optimal for energizing and communicating with potential defenders in the interior. The Byzantines at and around Carthage did not coordinate their resistance effectively

³⁹ Camps *sv.* "Dromadaire," *EB* 2541–6. Broader issues and bold interpretations concerning the camel: Bulliet 1975.

⁴⁰ However Zuckerman 2005: 108–25, argues that the Byzantine Empire developed no formal fleet until Constans II developed it as a reaction to Mu'awiya's creation of an effective and dangerous Muslim naval force by 654 or 655 (Battle of Phoenix or in Muslim historical tradition The Battle of the Masts). But even before the formation of any hypothesized formal Byzantine fleet in the wake of events in 655, the Byzantines possessed extensive access to experienced nautical personnel and had the ability to requisition ships for military purposes. Communications and transport within their empire rested on their ability to use and benefit from extensive resources for maritime communications and transport. Criticisms of Zuckerman's thesis: Cosentino, 2007: 598–601. Also see remarks of Cosentino "La flotta bizantina e l'Islam," in Carile and Cosentino 2004: 260–3. On navy in Africa also Pryor and Jeffreys 2006: 20–9.

with autochthonous tribes in the Aures Mountain region of Numidia and elsewhere. The Byzantines remained wary of encouraging autochthonous resistance because of their traditional fear of local rebellions or potential ambitious local leaders who might try to overthrow the emperor.

The question is: What were North Africa and its inhabitants getting in return for the growing and seemingly insatiable demands for revenue from the central Byzantine imperial authorities? It is the pressuring of Byzantine North Africa for maximal fiscal revenues for Byzantium's exigencies in the east, Anatolia, that exacerbated and interacted with the already acrimonious theological disputes and imperial fears of more military unrest, as a result complicating and hindering the development of any effective coherent defense of seventh-century North Africa against the gathering Muslim forces.

North Africa, from one perspective, existed to milk funds to help endangered Constantinople and Anatolia, and for some as a place to which to send assorted security risks as political and religious exiles. Seventh-century religious exiles included St. Maximus the Confessor, who opposed governmental policy on Christology, namely, he rejected the imperial doctrine of Monotheletism ("One Will" in Jesus Christ).⁴¹

There was no realistic possibility of peaceful accommodation of Christian populations with Muslims until Muslim military victories and successful Muslim negotiations with autochthonous peoples convinced local Christians in North Africa that there was no viable option except submission. Otherwise their lives, families, livestock, and property were at great risk. No one suggests that there were initially any sudden conversions of Latins in North Africa to Islam. Only late in the process of the Muslim campaigns, out of desperation on viewing the devastation wrought by autochthonous tribes, did the remaining Byzantines and Christian inhabitants of Africa reportedly turn to the Muslims for assistance and security.⁴² The critical areas for decisive combat with the Muslims lay far from the regions and towns where St. Augustine of Hippo had developed his career and teachings and episcopacy two and a half centuries earlier.

The linguistic and cultural gaps between Byzantine Greeks and Latin-literate North African inhabitants and autochthonous peoples who used neither Greek nor Latin are important to note but difficult to assess.⁴³ The

⁴¹ Winkelmann 1987: 515–59; Duchesne 1925: 437–40, 453–8.

⁴² Al-Mālikī, *Riḥāḥ* 53–4. Some might see an historical parallel to the reported much later desperate resignation and acceptance of early Ottoman invaders by residents of thirteenth-century Bithynia who wished to escape the ruin of their crops and orchards: Arnakis 1947.

⁴³ Best survey: Averil Cameron 1993.

Byzantines never appreciated the heritage of Latin literature in North Africa, not even the Augustinian one, and it is unclear how many Romano-Africans understood the Byzantines' Greek or their cultural heritage. This was not a new problem: it already existed in the lifetime of St. Augustine. The Byzantines appear not to have mastered or used Latin literature and culture in North Africa to full advantage. But what could they have done with it? A cultural gap was already yawning. The Byzantines did not reach out effectively to the inhabitants of North Africa. But whether that gap and miscomprehension affected the outcome of the Muslim conquests is uncertain. The cultural and linguistic gap impeded the creation of any unified and integrated defense.

Broader questions arise. A scholar has wondered why truces between Byzantium and the Umayyad Caliphate, as in 653 and following years, did not apply in North Africa.⁴⁴ The simple answer is probably that in a technical sense the terms of such truces may not have been applicable to North Africa, and in a realistic sense, local Muslim commanders, starting with 'Amr b. al-Āṣ, often acted on their own discretion and interests in the light of the local conditions as they understood them. They were not strictly controlled from Medina or Damascus even at that time.

Many questions remain unanswered about how either Byzantines or Muslims transferred knowledge and successful stratagems and procedures from one military front, say the Levant, to Africa, and the reverse. Some of that exchange occurred, but the sources are inadequate to trace it for either Muslims or Byzantines. Presumably individual commanders carried with them their experiences from one region to the other. But no explicit information exists on this issue.

It is debatable whether the Byzantines had many talented military commanders anywhere in their empire in the 630s and later in that century. Emperor Heraclius reportedly grieved strongly late in his reign for the death of General John Barkaines in Egypt, but whether he could have saved matters is unknown. In no case did the Byzantines send any such distinguished and competent persons from the east to assume command in North Africa to fight the Muslims there.

The earlier Roman military heritage has problematical relevance for the end of Byzantine Africa. One wonders how much the Byzantines in North Africa knew about Roman military precedents or found relevance from them other than recycling stones and buildings to turn into

⁴⁴ Stratos 1968-80: 1v: 25.

fortifications or using certain Roman-discovered sites for watchtowers.⁴⁵ The world of the old Third Legion was gone. There is no evidence for maintenance of the old Roman post system or Roman roads, the latter of which cannot have disappeared, in the seventh century. Certain Roman traditions like the consulate were temporarily revived at the beginning of the seventh century by the godfather of the dynasty, Heraclius the Exarch, the father of the emperor. It is questionable how much detailed knowledge Byzantines had of Roman warfare and traditions in North Africa, especially given the Vandal interlude with some broken continuities. The tacit advice in the older Byzantine military manuals for fighting Arabs was to use other Arabs (Saracens) against them, which was not feasible in North Africa.

What all of this underscores is the pivotal role of the Byzantine naval forces, even though the existence of a regular fleet in this era has been the object of skepticism,⁴⁶ and also the greater degree of resistance in the north of Africa Proconsularis or Zeugitana, where the rougher terrain was more favorable for defense and for hiding. Once the Byzantine armies and fleet were defeated here, it was relatively easy for invading Muslims to cover the much greater physical distance west to the straits of Gibraltar, where there was little Byzantine presence even though there were formidable autochthonous forces and formidable terrain.

There is no evidence that any new system of land grants for Byzantine soldiers was created in the final half-century or so of Byzantine rule in North Africa. The Byzantine government found no institutional means for checking or reversing the Muslims in Africa. No Arabic text offers details on the financial structure or any other means of support for Byzantine soldiers in North Africa.⁴⁷ The core of resistance to the Muslims after the death of Constans II was in the hands of autochthonous tribal groupings and their leaders, especially those from the region of the Eurasian Mountains where the Byzantines were in no position to impose military reforms, especially any that involved what the tribes regarded as their lands. Their resistance gives no indication of reflecting any Byzantine military reforms of any kind. The discontent of North

⁴⁵ On earlier Roman military policies in Africa, Cherry 1998, Mattingly 1992. Scipionic military precedents remained embedded in fragments from Polybius' History, but without direct relevance or association with realities of the Byzantine period.

⁴⁶ Christides 2000 offers some insights. See Zuckerman 2005 and Cosentino 2007 for contrasting views on the existence of a significant and permanent Byzantine fleet in the late seventh century.

⁴⁷ Ibn Khaldūn, *Ta'rikh* VII: 10–11, provides only vague and brief allusion to what he regarded as the alien, imperfect and temporary impositions of Christianity and obligations on the autochthonous North African tribes by the extraneous "Franks" and Romans.

African Roman landholders does not support any hypothesis of military land reforms either.

The abortive revolt of the Byzantine (and Armenian) usurper commander Mizizios (Mnez Gnuni?) in Sicily after the assassination of Constans II in 669 was put down with the aid of troops from the exarchate of Africa, among the diverse array of forces used.⁴⁸ It was, however, an untimely distraction from the urgent task of defending Africa against the Muslims. It was part of the problem of local dissension's facilitating the penetration by the Muslim invaders. It happened several times in Africa, and it would happen in the future in Sicily. Byzantine Africa could not afford to have abortive usurpers at that critical time. A successful and devastating Arab raid on Sicily occurred immediately thereafter, indicating that Muslims were informed of internal Byzantine developments and were watching and trying to coordinate their activities with them, including in Sicily. It is likely that in their strikes in North Africa, Muslims were also mindful of internal Byzantine conditions in Sicily and even in Constantinople and elsewhere. The participation of Byzantine troops from North Africa in the suppression of Mizizios' revolt in 669 indicates that some reliable mobile, presumably elite, troops were present in Africa, not merely passive defensive garrisons. They were not the only participants in the suppression of that revolt, for other Byzantine units came from the Balkans and Italy.

Discontent with Byzantine Exarchs of Africa because of local grievances may well be linked to the controversy that swirled around Constans II and the abortive imperial usurper Mizizios. Byzantine control in North Africa enjoyed two external respites owing nothing to its own efforts: the first and second Arab civil wars, the first after the murder of the Caliph 'Uthmān in 656, which lasted until 661, and the second, the struggle of the Marwānids against 'Abd Allāh b. Zubayr, which lasted from 680 until 692 (see Table 1 at the end of Chapter 1). At the end of each of those civil wars there was a major resumption of Muslim military activity. One must be aware of the synchronization of major Muslim advances against Byzantium with the termination of those Muslim civil wars. When those wars were in full swing, local Muslim commanders in the west could not realistically expect much military assistance in the form of troops, supplies, horses, and funds. So both sides, Byzantine and Muslim, had their own internal problems that from time to time very seriously and clearly

⁴⁸ Kaegi 1981a: 165–6, 182–3. Haldon 2005 has convincingly refuted the objections posed by Lounghis 1991: 55. Corsi 1983: 186–206; useful is *sv.* "Mizizios," no. 5163, *PMBZ* 3: 312–13.

affected the military, political, economic, and fiscal situation in North Africa.

The struggling Papacy was in no position to aid North Africa except via suasion because of its own difficulties with the Lombards and its concerns about imperial Christological policies and imperial taxation in Italy and Sicily. The Papacy lacked substantial discretionary funds, ships, or soldiers to commit to North Africa. Nor would there have been any other Christian state in Europe in a position to project power to come to the assistance of Christians in North Africa.⁴⁹

What more could have been done? The Roman/Byzantine population of North Africa, with the important exception of the autochthonous portion, was not trained in the use of arms, and no unusual new effort appears to have been made to train it. Passive resistance, verbal apology, or polemics would not have worked against the Muslims.

The Roman African specialist David Cherry argues that the objective of the earlier Romans in Africa was to protect the soldiers themselves and control movement of peoples and the imposition of taxes in the form of customs duties, not the erection of defensible frontiers against invasions.⁵⁰ Cherry deemphasizes the role of control of the transhumant movement.⁵¹ He argues against much cultural integration or any notion of a Roman drive for Romanization or urbanization or sedentarization.⁵² According to Cherry little evidence exists for cultural change during the Roman occupation in North Africa, especially in Algeria.⁵³ Autochthonous peoples apparently were estranged from the Roman army that occupied their land.⁵⁴ But Cherry refers primarily to an earlier era of Roman occupation of Roman North Africa, not to the seventh century.

Muslims managed to raise or assign to North Africa an estimated 40,000 troops of one kind or the other in the early 'Abbāsīd period (750–875 CE).⁵⁵ It was wholly impractical in the seventh century for the Byzantines to have allocated comparable numbers (anything near 40,000) of its own soldiers to North Africa, unless they had somehow raised them from the autochthonous population in Africa and simultaneously managed to develop ties of loyalty to Byzantium from those same local populations. That challenge was too difficult to accomplish, or at any rate the Byzantines authorities

⁴⁹ Guillou 1969: 1; T. S. Brown 1984: 39–163.

⁵⁰ Cherry 1998: 31–3. His thesis bears some resemblance to that of Isaac 1990/1992: 372–426, who investigates policies and practices on the edge of the eastern provinces.

⁵¹ Cherry 1998: 60–2. ⁵² Cherry 1998: 28, 67–9, 69–70, 76–8.

⁵³ Cherry 1998: 141. ⁵⁴ Cherry 1998: 161.

⁵⁵ Al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh* III: 304–5; see Kennedy 2001: 97.

failed to accomplish it. They could not have shifted such numbers of troops from their embattled east or from perilously exposed areas of Italy or southeastern Europe to North Africa.

Ecclesiastical and political divisions unquestionably compromised the development of both local defense and securing maximally coordinated assistance from Constantinople. Yet going it alone would not have worked without the total cooperation of the autochthonous tribes, who were not united. Even though the Heraclian family had familial ties with an African landowning family, North African landowners seem to have been unable to use such ties to gain significant tax relief. The crisis was too great in the east to allow the imperial government to permit special privileges, and in particular exemption from taxes, for the western provinces and their subjects.

ENDURING CONSTANTS

Byzantine military unrest affected and hindered an effective defense in North Africa on a number of occasions: the revolt of Gregory in 645-7, the reported defection of a disaffected governor shortly after the death of Gregory, the combined assassination of Constans II in Sicily and rebellion of Mizizios in Sicily, the mutiny of Byzantine naval forces sent by Leontius in 695/6 to recover Carthage, and of course the unstable and repeated turnover of emperors at Constantinople between 695 and 717, from Justinian II to Leo III (see Table 1 in Chapter 1). This list omits instances of autochthonous unrest. All of this complicated and inhibited the development of coherent defenses of Byzantine Africa. The sequence of unrest presented an appalling spectacle to the empire's subjects who may well have lost any remaining shreds of confidence in or loyalty to a volatile, unstable entity that offered a poor contrast to the burgeoning Islamic state.

It was perilous for the Byzantine Empire to shift troops or naval forces between eastern and North African fronts. Such decisions, however necessary, frequently caused unrest among troops that could even transform into open revolt. That problem of military unrest bedeviled all Byzantine intervention in Africa, including abortive actions against the Vandals in the fifth century. It was present from the beginning of the Byzantine reconquest in the 530s until the disappearance of Byzantine forces at the end of the seventh century. It was a constant.

Even the last moments of Byzantine rule involved internal Byzantine strife that drained away the possibility of maximizing defense capabilities. The important Byzantine fleet that had come to the relief of Carthage,

and had temporarily retaken it in 697 from the Muslims, had returned to Crete for more reinforcements and probably for repairs and better supplies. There, fearing imperial punishments for poor performance, the crew of that Byzantine fleet mutinied and proclaimed their commander Apsimar emperor as Tiberius II, and sailed instead to Constantinople, where they temporarily managed to put him on the throne, only for him to be overthrown and executed by the last member of the Heraclian dynasty, Justinian II, who returned from exile in 705 to massacre the usurpers and purge their adherents. Byzantine historical memory identified that final Byzantine moment in North Africa with shame or disgrace, αἰσχύνη.⁵⁶ There was no way to spin it as some kind of success, and succeeding imperial dynasties and their chroniclers found it in their interests to blame the failed and murdered Emperor Tiberius II Apsimar (698–705) for the final shameful loss. By 705 it was too late for Byzantium to do anything effective to save North Africa for the empire.⁵⁷ The last Heraclian dynasty emperor Justinian II did not have the resources to divert there to try to reverse the situation. There was no longer any major Christological problem for the government, but Emperor Justinian II had too many other internal problems, and problems in the east with Muslims, for him to be able to afford and risk the dispatch of ships and troops to North Africa again. The dynasty had arisen because of revolt in North Africa by Heraclius and his father Heraclius, and its authority in Africa and Numidia perished in the midst of centrifugal movements and rebellions as well as external military pressures. It was appropriate that it succumbed in the context of military unrest. Others might wonder whether Byzantine initiatives in North Africa were not always too late to have any real chance of success.

It is unclear whether the Byzantines ever learned any lessons from their unsuccessful efforts to hold on to North Africa. Their extant histories preserve only small scraps of information about the seventh century, and instead literary memory survives concerning achievements in the sixth century. Other powers in North Africa failed to learn from earlier North African history; Byzantium was no exception.⁵⁸ In the end, it was proving

⁵⁶ Johannes Zonaras, *Epit.* xiv.23.6; Pinder and Büttner-Wobst III: 234. Σύννομις Χρονική, Μεσαιωνική Βιβλιοθήκη: VII: 115.

⁵⁷ Kaegi 1981a: 186–208; Zuckerman 2005: 105–6.

⁵⁸ The specialist Charles Saumagne made an insightful comment in his review, "A propos d'une 'Histoire de l'Afrique du Nord' II," in his collection in the Carthage Museum Library, inserted with manual corrections in his own personal copy of Julien (clipped) from *Dépêche Tunisienne*, perhaps on January 27, 1932, or shortly thereafter: "Il semble que le trait saillant de cette histoire d'Ifrîqiya, – considérée du moins sous l'angle politique, – ait été le défaut de tradition. Les événements y paraissent surgir isolément et cependant, se ressembler tous comme si quelque génie s'y

too risky in terms of provoking more military or naval revolts to try to commit crack but costly expeditionary forces to Africa for the long term. The persistent problem of rebellion continued to plague Byzantine Africa from the unsuccessful 536 one of Stortzas to the naval mutiny of 698 that brought an end to Byzantine intervention in North Africa. From the perspective of Constantinople the denouement in 698 terminated a costly drain of human and material resources and strategic prioritization that the empire could ill afford as the eighth century approached.

A process repeated itself. Previously, in the sixth century, Vandal resistance to the Byzantines faded out. However a handful of Vandals reportedly joined autochthonous tribesmen, who became the backbone of resistance to the Byzantines after 535 CE. Similarly, in the face of the Muslims, the role of Byzantines themselves in resistance to the Muslims also faded out and gradually become intermingled, in a slower and harder to trace process, in the autochthonous resistance to the Arab Muslims that Kasila and Kâhina led and symbolized in later memory.⁵⁹

Muslim memory of the conquest selectively celebrated Zubayrid or Marwânid or other Umayyad leaders or notable ancestors of later Qayrawâni families, according to the memory of the Umayyad era (680–750 CE) that was in the process of formation. The Byzantines for their part had nothing much to celebrate from the final decades of their rule in North Africa, and so it is not surprising that they allowed their own memory to atrophy and shrink to negligible dimensions. After John Troglita in the late sixth century⁶⁰ no Byzantine families cherished any proud memories of their ancestors' participation in the North African campaigning, and thus had no desire to celebrate their exploits in any historical prose or verse. Interestingly, no known literary work feted any North African accomplishments of Heraclius or his father the Exarch Heraclius.

The seventh-century disagreements of civilians and rebellions in North Africa against the Byzantine government were part of a larger phenomenon of difficult relations between the government and its local civilian leaders. As we have seen, the imperial government did not want to lose revenue to the Muslims because that strengthened the Muslims materially as well as in terms of prestige, and it compromised Byzantine sovereignty. And of course it deprived the Byzantine government of desperately needed

exercit à réussir d'inlassables restaurations d'identités, glissant toutes vers des fins semblables à travers des cycles courts. Conquêteurs et conquis ignorent et dédaignent également les lois propres de l'histoire du pays qu'ils prennent et qu'ils perdent" (no pagination).

⁵⁹ Modéran 2003a: 798–9. Modéran 2006.

⁶⁰ Corippus celebrated the deeds of John in his *Iohannidos*.

funds. So already in Syria and in Egypt the Byzantine government had clamped down on local practices of making local arrangements with the Muslim commanders in return for payments of funds. But that did not halt the Muslims. What happened in North Africa was not unique.

The early and relatively early Christian primary sources all interpret the end of Byzantine North Africa in terms of religious causes. Maximus the Confessor saw the events as a sign that the end of the world was near and also as a divine punishment for an imperial government with an erroneous theology. Governmental officials, for their part, defended their Monothelete policies and made the Chalcedonian theological apologist Maximus the scapegoat for the impending loss of North Africa as well as for Egypt. Monophysite (Miaphysite) Christians in the east saw the fall of Africa as punishment for Maximus and his fellow monks' theology and conduct. In any case, Monophysites in North Africa did not resolve their differences with Chalcedonians and Catholics and accordingly did not participate in any united defense of North Africa against the Muslims. Given their limited numbers they probably were a very modest or negligible pool of potential military recruits, but their disputes and hostility contributed to psychological disunity and negative morale. But this is hard to quantify. For Muslims the outcome was a vindication of the righteousness of their religion and a punishment for the stubborn unbelievers who had refused Islam when they received a last chance to embrace it. Those who continued to quarrel lost everything, because the ultimate victors, the Muslims, spared neither landowners nor wealth of any of the churches; all were swept away. Unlike the situation that prevailed in the east, that is the Levant, many North Africans did not feel it safe to remain and many were able to flee.

The pattern of Muslim conquests in North Africa arises from but is not identical with those in western Asia and Egypt. It occurred in the midst of domestic fiscal, political, military, ecclesiastical, and theological discord even more acrimonious than that which occurred in the east. Contemporaries found it easy to point blame in terms of a religious frame of reference, but no one could find a satisfactory rational way out of their difficult situation that still preserved their property and integrity in North Africa. The Muslim occupation of North Africa brought a more profound change in society, language, and religion than did the Germanic invasions of Europe in the fifth century.⁶¹

⁶¹ Ward-Perkins 2005: 81–2.

A controversial subject is the formation of Islamic thought and Byzantine knowledge of it.⁶² Sources are insufficient to document how Byzantium adjusted its policies in seventh-century North Africa as its knowledge of Islam became fuller, although never very accurate. Some investigators of early Islamic history believe that Islam was taking form and indeed maturing in the late seventh century. What is certain is the decisive consolidation of policies, institutions, and infrastructure during the caliphate of 'Abd al-Malik b. Marwān. Yet extension of Muslim authority and institutions in North Africa remained tenuous and incomplete. These are very controversial topics. For their part, Byzantine sources on North Africa do not help to illuminate that process.

Christian apocalyptic beliefs probably contributed to paralyzing some Christian resistance, spreading terror that induced flight, and probably caused some resigned acquiescence.⁶³ In distant Muslim-occupied Sinai St. Anastasius the Sinaite sometime in the late seventh century regarded "Arab" mistreatment of Christians as a divine punishment.⁶⁴ He did not refer explicitly to North African conditions. He regarded orthodox (Chalcedonian) possession of holy places in Palestine and the east under a regime of Muslim occupation, without any reference to North Africa, as a sign of divine will, especially since the Arab tribal leaders or "phylarchs" did not permit heretical (non-Chalcedonian) Christians to gain possession of them.⁶⁵ Whether contemporary North African Christians shared his sentiments we do not know. But eschatological expectations that spread among Muslims in Syria probably affected Muslims in Egypt and Tripolitania and newly occupied regions of North Africa.⁶⁶

The Byzantines could draw on a long tradition, both Roman and Byzantine, for ways to handle autochthonous revolts, but the record was neither happy nor always successful. Moreover, the extant Byzantine military manuals such as Maurice's *Strategikon* offer no wisdom about how to fight Arabs, let alone how to fight anyone else in North Africa.⁶⁷ Local

⁶² El Cheikh 2004: 1–138; Bonner 2005; Dagron 1997: 37–49.

⁶³ Reinink, on Ps.-Methodius, *Die syrische Apokalypse des Pseudo-Methodius* (CSCO, 540–1 = SS 220–1).

⁶⁴ Anastasius Sinaite, *Quaestiones et responsiones*, 101.1–36, (Richard and Munitiz): 161–3.

⁶⁵ Anastasius Sinaite, *Quaestiones et responsiones*, Appendix 20.42–57, p. 210.

⁶⁶ D. B. Cook 2002a; Bashear 1991a.

⁶⁷ G. T. Dennis 1981 edition and German translation of Maurice, *Strategikon*, with Dennis Eng. trans. 1984. I have not seen a new translation with commentary that Philip Rance is preparing for Ashgate/Variorum, *The Roman Art of War in Late Antiquity: The Strategikon of the Emperor Maurice: A Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (Aldershot: in press). However see African drill in *Strategikon* 6.3.

improvisation and tradition in handling such problems was probably the case, not well-laid-out policies in Constantinople.

Muslim traditions report that much contact continued between those Muslims who were in the process of conquering Africa and the Umayyad leadership in Damascus.⁶⁸ That is consistent with insights about the process of the Muslim conquests in Syria and Iraq.⁶⁹ One cannot blindly trust such traditions, however.

Should the Muslim reports about operations in late seventh-century North Africa be rejected as simply later fabrications? Not all of them.⁷⁰ Reports in Ibn 'Idhāri's account of Muslim raiding from the early site at Qayrawān against 'Ayn Jallūla, which they stormed, are plausible. Jallūla (Cululis) is a site that has not received much investigation at all, yet it has the remnants of a Roman citadel. It is very probable that it fell early in the 660s or by 670, and we may surmise that after it, Ksar Lemsa fell, and a string of fortresses at or near the hills behind Ksar Lemsa.⁷¹

Byzantine troops and naval strength in Sardinia probably reinforced Byzantine defenses in Africa, and ports in Sardinia probably reinforced provisioning, just as they helped to suppress rebellion against the imperial government in 668. But no Sardinian narrative of seventh-century events exists. Corsica remained under Byzantine control and its forests may have contributed timber, but sources remain silent about any contribution of Corsica or Corsicans or, for that matter, inhabitants of the Balearics to the defense of seventh-century Byzantine Africa against Muslims. Lombard threats from Italy may have rendered it impossible for Corsica to offer any help in that desperate period. Corsica was probably on its own. It was too small, with too few potential soldiers. No Byzantine officials are known there for the seventh century. Corsicans may be included under the name *Sardinians* but no certain proof exists for that hypothesis.

News of the Prophet Muḥammad and of an embarrassing Byzantine military defeat in Palestine at the hands of Muslims reached Byzantine Africa rapidly in the early 630s. The contemporary *Doctrina Jacobi nuper baptizati*, an anti-Jewish dialogue, reports that Jews in Carthage, the

⁶⁸ Ibn 'Abd al-Ḥakam, *Futūḥ Miṣr* (Torrey): 185–6; Gateau 1948: 42–55.

⁶⁹ Donner 1981 observed that the early Muslims avoided coastal areas and penetrated strategic areas in the interior that were more difficult for the Byzantines to defend. But Noth with Conrad 1994: 80–2, 87–90, 183; Donner 2002–3.

⁷⁰ Long 1978 shows that this text is of little or no historical value, although useful for the study of literary elaboration. Long suspect have been alleged transcriptions of thapsodies from Qayrawān about the early Muslim conquest: Maitrot de la Motte-Capron 1911; Maitrot de la Motte-Capron 1927: 220–32.

⁷¹ On Ksar Lemsa, Belkhdodja 1968.

administrative seat of Byzantine control of Africa, were discussing such shocking events and their possible eschatological significance before the middle of the summer of 634 CE.⁷² In any case, many North Africans at least in the coastal cities were more or less informed of the principal course of events.

Multiple clouds of suspicion envenomed any attempt of the Byzantines to defend North Africa against the Muslims: suspicions against Christian opponents of official religious policies concerning Christology, that is, official Monotheletism; suspicions against African elites who might seek to revolt, just as Heraclius and his father had done in the not so distant past; suspicions against powerful political and military leaders in the light of earlier Byzantine military unrest; suspicions against non-Christians, such as Jews; and suspicions against prominent politicians and ecclesiastics in Italy and Sicily as well because their activities could affect Africa and governmental communications with North Africa.

Hostilities between Jews and the Heraclian dynasty and local Catholic clergy cannot have contributed positively to the development of any cohesive efforts to defend Byzantine Africa against the Muslims. However even the legend of Kâhina indicates that there was a potential for resistance against the Muslims among some seemingly Jewish constituencies. There is no known imperial allegation of any Jewish collaboration with Muslims or any kind of Jewish betrayal of Africa. Instead blame was imputed to disaffected Chalcedonians and Catholics. No known sources other than the skimpy early scraps in the *Doctrina Jacobi* enable the investigator to evaluate Jewish reactions to Muslim military probes.

The Byzantine exarchate of Africa as an institution failed to provide adequate leadership or strength to resist the Muslims. The failure of Gregory's revolt and the failure of his efforts to gather a defense against the Muslims in 647 show that local North Africans had no sure idea of how to defend themselves effectively against an emerging invader from the southeast.

The Byzantine forces in North Africa lacked much of a mobile defense after 647. They chose to rely heavily on their fortified positions. But such a strategy, which some modern military historians label as Vegetian,⁷³ immobilized and scattered whatever forces they possessed. It conceded the initiative and mobility to the Muslims.

⁷² Wider Jewish eschatological hopes: van Bekkum 2002.

⁷³ Rogers 2002: 8–19 “The Vegetian ‘Science of Warfare’ in the Middle Ages” 8–19; Morillo 2002: 21–5.

North Africa experienced temporary occupations by many powers whose seats of power originated outside of North Africa. Only the Romans and the Muslims successfully managed to dominate and occupy the region for extended periods. The Byzantine occupation was a Roman revival of sorts but somewhat resembled ephemeral regimes of other powers. The Byzantines failed to establish any essential identity of interests with North Africans that would cause North Africans en masse to struggle to the death to maintain Byzantine authority. Some of the explanation lies in the earlier history of the Byzantine reconquest and initial mistakes of imperial decision-makers and their appointees in policy-making. The Muslims also probably noticed that Byzantine relations with autochthonous tribes had not been good in the sixth century. Memories of Byzantine trickery and murders of autochthonous leaders in the sixth century poisoned or at least complicated the atmosphere in the seventh century. Yet no possibility existed for raising large numbers of Byzantine troops for defense of Africa without using autochthonous tribesmen. Not enough local Latin inhabitants of Africa were good potential recruits for military service. No possibility existed for procuring soldiers from beleaguered Byzantine Italy, or Sicily, let alone from the still more crisis-ridden and threatened Byzantine east (Anatolia, Armenia), or from the mostly disappeared Byzantine-controlled regions of the Balkans. But this is not the place to engage in a full-scale reevaluation of the totality of the history of Byzantine Africa.

In sum, the loss of Byzantine North Africa had negative fiscal and strategic consequences for Byzantium. It lost fiscal revenues, ports, prestige, a lively and talented Latin and autochthonous population, potential manpower, trade, and markets. The loss however did not occupy a large place in the longer Byzantine historical memory. For the tenth-century Emperor Constantine VII Porphyrogenitus the loss of territory in the west was a demonstrable event in the diminution of the former dimensions of his empire.⁷⁴ But Carthage loomed larger for the identity of ancient and imperial Rome than it did for Byzantium. Pedantic Byzantium recalled Carthage and its formidable Byrsa Hill through the lens of Polybius' history and the Scipionic historical associations with the ancient Roman conquest of Carthage.⁷⁵ In the seventh century the impending loss of North Africa

⁷⁴ Constantine VII, *De thematibus*, pt., ed. A. Pertusi (Rome: 1952) 60. Νυνὶ δὲ στενωθείσης κατὰ τὴν ἀνατολὰς καὶ δυσμὰς τῆς Ῥωμαϊκῆς βασιλείας καὶ ἀκρωτηριασθείσης ἀπὸ τῆς ἀρχῆς Ἡρακλείου τοῦ Αἰβνός.

⁷⁵ Κρωχηθὼν, ἢ καὶ Ἀφρικὴ καὶ Βύρσαι λεγομένη. Souda = Suidas, *Lexicon*, ed. A. Adler (repr. Scuttgart: 1989) 1: 434, cf. 1: 501.

was a subject of fingerpointing and scapegoating among Byzantine officials and Christian clergy, but its loss did not directly threaten Byzantine identity or call into question the very survival of Byzantium. Later Byzantine historians did not assign it much coverage. The empire survived a long time after its loss of North Africa. Refugees from North Africa do not appear to have formed any significant or permanent community at Constantinople after the Muslim conquest, in contrast to the landholders and ecclesiastics who earlier fled the Vandal conquest and lobbied successfully for a Byzantine reconquest.

Byzantine North Africa during its century and a half of existence made a difference for the fortunes of Byzantium. It was the springboard for Heraclius' seizure of power in 608–10. However it is unproven that the creation of the exarchate in North Africa in the late sixth century caused great institutional changes in Byzantium, such as the development of the Byzantine "theme system," and it is likewise unproven that Heraclius brought the idea of the African exarchate to Anatolia or that his grandson Constans II developed fundamental military reforms in North Africa that were essential to Byzantium's survival in the seventh and eighth centuries. These are simply improbable speculations. Events in seventh-century North Africa were important to Byzantium but the Byzantines did not provide the elements to save and rehabilitate and restore their authority. If fundamental Byzantine military reform took place in North Africa under Constans II, why is there silence about it in the sources? If it occurred and was so important for ultimate Byzantine survival in Anatolia, why did it not permit Byzantine Africa to survive? How were these supposed reforms transmitted from Africa to Anatolia and by whom? Did these involve Byzantines or autochthonous tribes or whom? And why, if this was so, did the strongest resistance to Muslims in the final decades of the seventh century emerge in the Aures Mountains region, where few Byzantines or Romano-African inhabitants lived, as far as we can tell from extant sources? These questions in fact are hardly worth asking because the hypothesized reforms do not appear to have taken place.

INTERRUPTED DEVELOPMENT?

The Byzantine occupation of North Africa generates other controversial reflections. An eminent specialist on Byzantine North Africa has argued that the Byzantine reconquest interrupted and blocked a process of symbiosis between Roman and autochthonous populations ("Berbers") in

North Africa.⁷⁶ This is an interesting speculation. Whether such a symbiotic process would have succeeded without the Byzantine intervention is uncertain. The Vandals represented an external armed interruption into North Africa as well. North Africans were unable to devise a defense on their own against the Vandals in the early fifth century. That failure is symptomatic of serious social and military weaknesses in early fifth-century North Africa long before the Byzantine invasion and interruption. Social and cultural symbiosis is not identical or synonymous with development of a viable military defense against the Muslims. Any emergent political symbiosis still had the task of developing an effective and lasting defense. Ethnic, political, and cultural symbiosis is an elusive concept and a rare reality, one that few ethnic groups other than the Franks managed to accomplish within the borders of the Roman Empire.⁷⁷ On the other hand, Laroui believes that many centuries before the Byzantine reconquest the Romans themselves, by intervening in Africa, blocked the development of a Berber civilization.⁷⁸ Morizot also speculates in somewhat similar fashion that "Rome and still less Byzantium knew how to make a nation. If the Vandal kingdom had abandoned Arianism it would perhaps have played that role and become the equivalent of a Visigothic Spain. The Byzantine reconquest did not permit this evolution and Africa went in other directions."⁷⁹

Ultimately it was not to be the fate of North Africans, given their location in the Mediterranean, to develop and defend a viable civilization, polity, and society in complete independence from external powers and influences, however regrettable some may find that.⁸⁰ Moreover it is unrealistic to expect that one could live and survive undisturbed very long at peace in any isolated bubble. Relentless and ultimately ruthless international political, commercial, technological, and military competition would interrupt any hopes for peaceful and natural development. The fate of North Africans involved the fortunes of warfare in the seventh century as well as in the twentieth. North Africa had to live and cope in a larger violent Mediterranean and Eurasian context. Effectiveness of military defenses against the Muslims is an important

⁷⁶ Modéran 2003a: 816–17. ⁷⁷ Drinkwater 2007: 347–63.

⁷⁸ Modéran 2003a: 816–17; Laroui 1970: 61–2, or in general pp. 61–5, in fact (while not disagreeing probably with Modéran) argues that Rome broke up and blocked the unification of the Maghrib that was in process. See his entire chapter "D'une colonisation à l'autre," pp. 32–65.

⁷⁹ P. Morizot 2002: 374.

⁸⁰ Conant 2004: 437–49 also believes that Romans and "Moors" were beginning to develop a synthetic culture before the Muslim conquest.

subject. No other part of the former Roman Empire that directly abutted Muslim territory on its own developed successful defenses against the expanding seventh-century Muslims except Byzantium in Anatolia (at a high cost) and Merovingian France. Both of these powers devised defenses in their own ways but benefited from the buffer of deep territory, climate, logistics, topography, and experience more than the inhabitants and defenders of North Africa could manage to do in the seventh century. It is easy to criticize with historical retrospection. The question itself however may reflect an essentially Eurocentric perspective. North Africans and Byzantines in North Africa could have done a better job with the resources at their disposal.

Philosophically, one may regard the history of these Byzantine and Muslim wars as part of a longer-term ebb and flow, sometimes violent and sometimes not, of Europeans, Levantines, and North Africans for control of this very rich and strategic region of the Mediterranean littoral and adjacent interior. For Ibn Khaldūn the *al-Faranja* (Franks, Latins) as well as the *Rūm* (Byzantines) were alien ethnics who had once crossed the Mediterranean in order to impose their rule on the al-Barbar or autochthonous inhabitants and their tribes in North Africa. Both, like the Arabs after them, only imperfectly imposed their domination.⁸¹ Some readers may wonder why the appropriate title of this investigation is not "The End of Ancient Africa" but the answer is not so simple. The end of Byzantine North Africa was categorically not the end of North Africa, which instead, together with its inhabitants, would flourish culturally, economically, and politically under Islam in new and different ways while retaining important continuities with its Roman and Byzantine precedents.

The distinguished late medieval Maghribi historian Ibn Khaldūn's reflections on the typological process of destruction and recreation of regimes should not be followed too strictly, but his conclusions are worth pondering with respect to the appearance and disappearance of Byzantine authority in North Africa and regimes that preceded and followed it.⁸² The Heraclian dynasty had seized power in Constantinople after a widely based revolt in North Africa, but it lost the support of many North Africans. Revolts and centrifugal tendencies gravely weakened it. The dynasty, and Byzantine rule with it, succumbed in a process somewhat reminiscent of cycles of rise and decline that Ibn Khaldūn analyzed in his *Muqaddimah*, in which he assigned a hundred and twenty years as the maximum lifespan

⁸¹ Ibn Khaldūn, *Ta'rikh* I: 266, 394, VII: 10.

⁸² Ibn Khaldūn, in general on phases, *Ta'rikh* I: 176–93. *Muqaddimah* (trans. Rosenthal): I: 336–61.

for a North African dynasty. Heraclian power rose and disappeared within those chronological limits.⁸³

Modern Maghribi scholars understandably show deep interest in local history and traditions, including especially those of Numidia and Mauretania. However interesting to modern autochthonous and Numidian enthusiasts, the ancient cases of Masinissa, Jugurtha, and Tacfarinas were not evoked to arouse or reinforce local resistance in the seventh century CE. Byzantine authorities would have reasoned from an entirely different group of premises. They would not have wished to encourage local autonomous resistance, whether tribal or otherwise, that might sooner or later turn against the Byzantine Empire and its leadership. Byzantine officials for their part did not want autonomous resistance anywhere in their empire. Creation and elaboration of autonomous institutions and loyalties were inconsistent with and potentially threatening to imperial control and imperial authority. The empire and the emperor were the priorities, not North Africa or their subjects in North Africa. The Byzantines were no more able and willing to encourage local autochthonous leaders in Africa or Numidia to assume titles such as king or emperor of Africans or Numidians and Romans than they had been for Arab leaders in the Syrian desert in the sixth century.⁸⁴

The consequences of protracted Byzantine–Muslim warfare for inhabitants of North Africa included multivariate deterioration of standards of living. Whatever elements of the heritage of gracious Roman civic existence and private leisure somehow had survived the Vandal occupation, the Byzantine reconquest, and autochthonous raiding, now gave way to a process that had taken place in other former possessions of the Roman Empire: simplification, continual contraction, and loss and retrenchment for the surviving settled populations.⁸⁵ The Byzantine encouragement of a Kasila and his Eurasian forces is a belated example of desperate Byzantine opening the door of imperial service to talent of whatever social and ethnic origin. But it was abortive and basically too little and too late. A process of reshaping the empire in the west permitted the rise of military professionals from backward provinces and also barbarians, resulting in the emergence of a multiethnic military aristocracy. It was as much a socio-economic as a cultural process, which readily admitted talents of whatever

⁸³ Ibn Khaldūn, *Ta'rikh* 1: 180, and in general 1: 176–93. Ibn Khaldūn, *Muqaddimah*, III: 12, (Rosenthal 1: 343–6).

⁸⁴ On pre-Islamic Arab sovereigns such as Imrul Qays arrogating the title of King of Arabs in the sixth century, and Byzantine policy toward them, see Shahid 1984: 31–53, and Shahid 2000: 76–85.

⁸⁵ Process of simplification, a concept of Goffart 2006: 235–9.

social origin to positions of leadership. In much of the west it "enriched the once-Roman world with new leadership and renewed purpose."⁸⁶ Kasila and even Kāhina may seem to offer glimmerings of a possible yet abortive North African variant of the process that took place on the northern side of the Mediterranean and beyond. But for many reasons the successful emergence and maturation of such a "barbarian" or fusion leadership would fail in the waning moments of Byzantine North Africa.

The challenge had been for the Byzantines to find or conceive some viable concept that would rally local Romano-Africans and Numidians to create and participate in a successful defense for the sake of the empire. They failed decisively.⁸⁷ Extant Byzantine chronicles and histories do not mention and certainly do not celebrate Kāhina or Kasila.⁸⁸ That mental gap may help to explain Byzantine failures to reach out and to encourage and develop local autonomous resistance to the Muslims after the fall of Carthage. It is unclear whether seventh-century autochthonous populations had any consciousness of the formidable heritage of earlier prominent figures such as Masinissa or Jugurtha.

Muslims possessed a number of talented leaders, who displayed a variety of skills and methods. The supple diplomacy and negotiating skills of Abū'l Muhājir Dīnār receive little publicity in the sources, even though he may have played at least as great a role in the conquest of Numidia and the winning of autochthonous support as did the more renowned 'Uqba b. Nāfi'. Ḥassān b. al-Nu'mān also possessed great skills in developing relations with autochthonous populations. Their ultimate successes and techniques, which are not narrated in detail, were more political than military. They diminished the need for military action. As two authorities on North African history observed, "the secret of the Arab success was not simply victory in the long struggle for Byzantine Africa, but the massive recruitment of Berbers which that victory entailed."⁸⁹

The Byzantines tried to conduct themselves as bearers of imperial authority but they lacked sufficient imperial military and political power to impose their will everywhere. The Muslims found opportunity in that deadlocked situation, and forcefully and permanently resolved that contradiction in Byzantine policy to their own advantage. Seventh-century Byzantine power in North Africa was unable to meet, or was overwhelmed

⁸⁶ Goffart 2006: 229. ⁸⁷ Here P. Morizot 2002 is correct.

⁸⁸ Only Elias of Nisibis refers to Kāhina, and then only to an unnamed queen of the Berbers. His source is unknown, *La Chronographie de Mar Elie Bar Sinaya*, 32r., p. 97. Elias is not a Byzantine source.

⁸⁹ Brett and Fentress 1996: 86.

by the multiple challenges from too many directions that emerge to confront empires. The imperative was to devise “the ingredients of successful military statecraft for the hierarchical but populist ethnic assemblages we think of as empires.” This required “a superior technology and organization, a motivating universalist ideology, the capacity to mobilize economic surplus from societies that can be profoundly unmilitary and settled, and the ability to convey that force to sites remote from the civilian centers of the realm.”⁹⁰ Muslims would devise a new polity to replace the Byzantine Empire that had failed to meet the challenge.

Despite some mistakes and temporary reverses Muslims brilliantly exploited vulnerabilities and then took measures that transformed spectacular yet ephemeral triumphs into long-term fundamental changes.⁹¹ In many ways the process of Islamicization is more complex and far more important for North Africa than the military operations and diplomacy of the conquest and collapse of Byzantine resistance. But that vital topic requires research into sources that cease to have any direct relationship with or knowledge of events in the Byzantine Empire.⁹² The Muslims were the beneficiaries of grave internal dynastic and religious problems and military unrest that rent the Byzantine Empire. But they brought their own strengths to a dynamic process. The Muslim invasions and failure of Byzantine defenses preceded what would take a long time to complete: the transformation of North Africa. The city of Constantine on the Bosphorus, Constantinople, failed in the end to reach out and cooperate properly with the other city of Constantine, which towers over the gorges of the Rhumel, in Numidia, in order to devise and coordinate successful resistance to the Muslims in North Africa. Carthage and Constantinople failed to compete with Qayrawān.

⁹⁰ Formulations of Maier 2006: 73. For a different perspective on empires: Haldon 2006b: 180–9.

⁹¹ The actual lengthy process of the Islamicization of North Africa is a separate and complex important subject for Islamicists to explain.

⁹² Scholars with other ranges of skills can investigate it far better than I can.

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SHEET MAPS

- US Army Map Service, Tunisia, 1942, and Great Britain, Geographical Section, General Staff (viewed at the Center for Maghrib Study [CEMAT]). Scale: 1: 200,000. Most notably: Sheet 11, Kairouan, copied from French map dated 1930. Sheet 13, Feriana, copied from French map of 1934. Sheet 14, Sbeitla, copied from French map of 1934 with revisions from intelligence reports of 1941. 44 sheets.
- Tunisie. Service géographique de l'Armée (France). 1927–1940s. Scale: 1–50,000. Most notably Sheet LXIII Kairouan 1927, Djebel Trozza LXX 1929, Pichon LXXII 1928, Djebel Mrhila LXXVII 1932, Hadjeb el Aioun LXXVIII 1933, Sbeitla LXXXV 1935. 115 Sheets.

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